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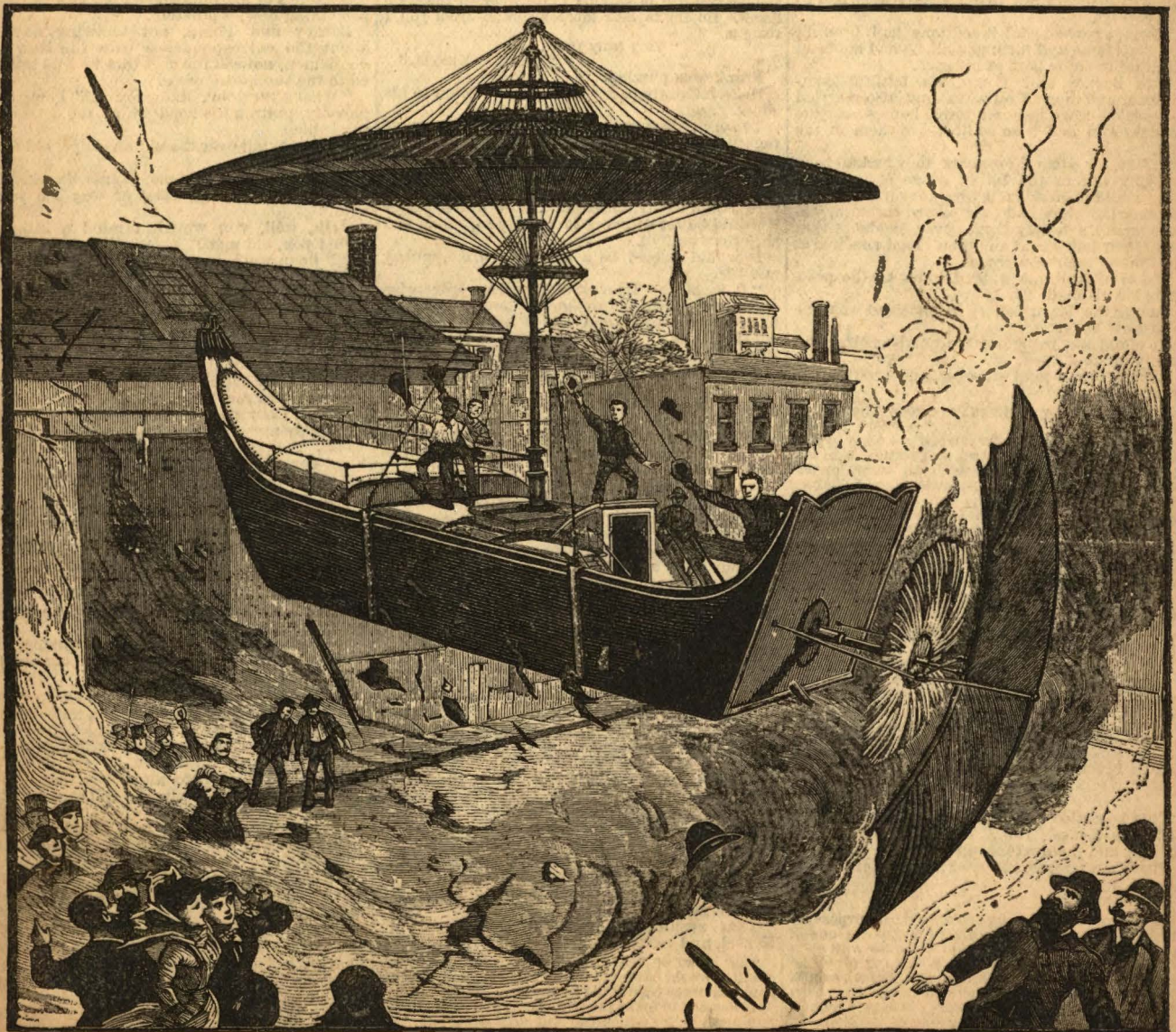
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Vol. II

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FRANK READE, JR., EXPLORING MEXICO IN HIS NEW AIR-SHIP. By "NONAME."



Faster and faster went the rotascope, and in another minute the air-ship began to rise. Barney and Pomp sprang up and began cheering and waving their hats. Kensel and Sallinger waved theirs also, catching the enthusiasm of the other two, and in a little while the air-ship was a thousand feet or more above the earth.

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FRANK READE, JR.,

EXPLORING MEXICO IN HIS NEW AIR-SHIP.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Across the Continent on Wings; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Greatest Flight," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s 'Sea Serpent;' or, The Search for Sunken Gold," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE, JR., RECEIVES A LETTER FROM NEW YORK ABOUT A NEW AIR-SHIP TO GO TO MEXICO.

FRANK READE, JR., was at home in Readestown.

He had settled down with his charming young wife and two children to enjoy the rest he had so well earned.

His many wonderful inventions had brought him both fame and fortune, and he had made up his mind to enjoy both at his ease.

Both Barney and Pomp, his faithful companions and men of all work, had also married and settled down in comfortable homes near the Reades, who had been so liberal to them in the past.

In fact, for some three years they had all been enjoying life in the fullest sense of the term. They would meet and talk over adventures which no other travelers had ever passed through, and have many a hearty laugh over incidents that made their hair stand and their blood run cold at the time of their occurrence.

One evening Frank walked down to the post-office for his mail.

Among the dozen letters he received was one from New York.

He could not recognize the hand-writing, and hastily broke it open.

It was from a total stranger, and read as follows:

"STOCK EXCHANGE, NEW YORK.

"OCT 15th, 187—.

"DEAR SIR,—I write in the interest of a party of gentlemen who desire to send two men to Mexico in one of your air-ships. Of course no man would undertake to make the trip except under your guidance. Can you be induced to go, and for what price? Please answer by return mail and very much obliged,

"Very truly yours,

"CHARLES KENSEL."

When he had finished reading the letter, he quietly remarked:

"I'm done with that kind of business," and proceeded to read his other letters.

But that night he sat down and wrote in reply to the letter:

"READESTOWN, Iowa, Oct. 17, 187—.

"DEAR SIR,—Yours of the 15th inst. is received, and in reply will say that I have given up the air-ship business. I have made enough to live comfortably on the rest of my life, and, at the earnest solicitation of my wife and parents, have decided to stay at home. Hoping you may find some other way to get to Mexico, I remain,

"Very truly yours,

"FRANK READE, JR."

This he sealed in an envelope and directed to "Charles Kensel, Esq.," at the New York Exchange, and the next morning it was mailed.

Five days later he received another letter from Kensel.

The letter ran:

"I believe that when you know for what purpose we propose to send two engineers to Mexico in one of your air-ships you will consent to unite with us in furthering the scheme. Mexico is making rapid developments, under the inspiration of American capital and energy. Millions of American money have been invested there in the last ten years. It is only a question of time as to her becoming one of the States of the Union. To hasten that time we are seeking to handle the commerce of that country and the vast Pacific coast trade. By building a railroad across from the Gulf to the Pacific we can turn all her commerce

toward our own country; and I believe you are patriotic enough to wish for such a consummation. But such a survey as would be required cannot be made in the ordinary way except at an immense loss of time, money, and, perhaps, life. But by means of your air-ship a bird's-eye view of the proposed route can be had from Ocean to Gulf. We care not what it may cost us. We appeal to you to come to our assistance, and thus give us an advantage over an English syndicate which is seeking to accomplish the same result. Hoping to hear more favorably from you, I remain,

"Very truly yours,

"CHARLES KENSEL."

Frank was puzzled.

He is intensely patriotic in his devotion to his country.

To serve his country in any way he had always regarded a sacred duty.

Here was a chance to give his country the advantage, in a commercial sense, over foreign bidders for the commerce of Mexico.

He could easily understand how much easier it would be for a survey to be made from an air-ship than on foot.

It would indeed be a saving of time, money and life.

"It is in the interest of American enterprise and commercial supremacy," he said, as he folded up the letter and laid it aside for future consideration, "and I must give it the careful thought that it deserves."

That evening he explained the matter to his wife.

She was as patriotic as himself, but she did not like to have him go away from home again.

"You and Pomp and Barney have all married and settled down," she said, "and we are all so happy and contented. It would be a pity to have them taken away from their wives. They would be so lonely. I have my children, and your father and mother would be company enough for me. But their wives would not be so well off. Think of all that before you make up your mind to go."

That was just like the noble young woman she was—to think of the comfort of others instead of her own.

Frank showed the letter to his father, and asked what he should do about it. Frank Sr. read the letter over very carefully, and said:

"I don't see how you can refuse them. They are well able to pay you for the trip. The air-ship survey will place the Americans ahead of everybody else in Mexico, and that is a point that moves me to advise you to accept their offer."

"That's the way I look at it. It seems that a foreign syndicate is trying to get ahead of the Yankees in bidding for the commerce of Mexico. A survey across the country on foot must necessarily be very slow and dangerous. The air-ship will be rapid and easy. I'll write to Mr. Kensel at once and tell him that I will go."

"I think I would under the circumstances," said his father.

That evening the young inventor wrote to Kensel, and said:

"In view of the fact that the prestige of my country would be sustained, and a large slice of Mexican commerce be secured by the proposed railroad, I have decided to make the trip. I shall have to build a new air-ship, for which you will have to pay, as well as the expenses of the trip—charging nothing for my services. I don't want the whole earth. I've got all I want in the way of money, and have no desire to figure as a millionaire. But if I can do anything to

place America ahead of all the other nations of the earth, I am always ready to respond to the call."

That letter met the wishes of the syndicate in the fullest sense, and Frank was instructed to construct any kind of an air-ship he thought would best answer the purpose and draw on them for the money.

Frank went to work overhauling all the various models of his old air-ships, in order to get up something new, if possible.

Barney and Pomp, not knowing anything about the correspondence with the New York gentlemen, noticed the fact that he was interested in the shop once more.

"What's yer doin', Marse Frank?" Pomp asked one day, putting his head in at the door of the workshop.

"I'm looking over the old air-ships, old man," he replied.

"Better lef 'em er lone, Marse Frank. Fust yer know yer'll be er flyin' er way off yander agin."

"Oh, well, you wouldn't mind a little sail, would you, old man?"

"I doan want no mo' sailin', Marse Frank. My wife does all dat now, sah."

"She does the sailing now, does she?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, when she finds out that you can sail, too, maybe she won't sail into you so heavy."

Pomp grinned, and shook his head.

"I likes ter hab her sail in," he said. "She am jes' de gal for me."

"Well, I am glad you are satisfied, old man. I am happy myself. But a little change is good for us all. A man doesn't want to eat chicken all the time, you know."

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac'. But Dinah ain't no chicken, sah."

"What is she, Pomp—a duck?"

Pomp chuckled, and said:

"Yes, sah, I spec she is. She hab got feet like de duck."

Frank roared.

"You didn't tell her so, did you?"

"No, sah. I ain't no fool," and he grinned again.

Soon after that he returned to his home, which was on the little farm adjoining the big estate of the Reades.

In the afternoon he paid a visit to Barney O'Shea on his farm, a quarter of a mile distant.

Barney was at work in his shirt sleeves, but gave his old comrade a hearty welcome.

"Barney," said Pomp, as he sat down and looked around as if to make sure that no third party could overhear what he had to say, "Marse Frank is at it ergin."

Barney stopped work and gazed at his old friend in a way that evinced an intense interest, and asked:

"Phat's that?"

"He is wuckin' in de shop," said Pomp, "wif dem air-ships."

"Be the powers!" exclaimed Barney, greatly excited, "it's meself as will be after knowin' phat it is," and he started off at once, in his shirt-sleeves, to pay a visit to the young inventor.

He had free access to every part of the Reade premises, as they knew him to be as honest as sunshine and as faithful as a dog.

Frank was in the shop, examining his last air-ship, when the impulsive Irishman entered.

"Hello, Barney!" exclaimed Frank, "what's the news?"

"Bedad, an' it's that same I want to know. Sure, an' av ye plaze, what's it now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sure, an' I mane to know," replied Barney, "is it an air-ship this toime again?"

"Oh, ho! Pomp has been to see you, hasn't he?"

"Yis, sorr."

"I thought so. Well, I'm going to look over the old ships and see if I can't get up a new idea in that line. It's been three years, you know, since I have had any fun at flying. A man must have some recreation once in a while."

"Sure, an' it's roight yer are," said Barney.

"Would ye after goin' away in the ship?"

Frank looked at the brawny fellow, and asked:

"You would like to go, would you?"

"Yis, sorr."

"All right, then, but don't say a word about it, not even to your wife and Pomp."

"Niver a worruid, sorr."

"That's right. I'll take you along, and we'll have no end of fun."

Barney was so glad that he executed a breakdown, and would have given one of his wild Irish yells, had not Frank restrained him.

He went away and told Pomp that he guessed it didn't mean anything after all.

Pomp shook his head, and said:

"I doan no 'bout dat," and returned to his own comfortable cottage to think over it all by himself.

In the meantime, Frank went to work to make a drawing of what kind of a ship he wanted.

He spent days and nights over his drawings, determined to get up something quite different from the others with which he had made a world-wide reputation.

By degrees he developed part after part, until the whole constituted a perfectly harmonious creation.

"I am sure that will be just the thing I want," he said, as he surveyed the picture he had drawn. "It is neat, strong and swift, and will meet every requirement that could possibly arise. I'll make a small model about four feet long and see how it will work. If it works well, I'll have a fine one built and make it the crowning work of my life."

CHAPTER II.

FRANK EXHIBITS THE MODEL OF THE NEW AIR-SHIP.

ABOUT thirty days after the correspondence between Frank and the stock exchange broker in New York, the latter received the following dispatch from the young inventor:

"READESTOWN, Iowa, Nov. 20, 187-.

"MR. CHARLES KENSEL.—The model of air-ship finished. Bring your friends and see it on the 27th inst.

FRANK READE, JR."

The next day Frank received the following reply:

"STOCK EXCHANGE, NEW YORK.

"Nov. 21, 187-.

"FRANK READE, JR.—Yours received. The syndicate of fifteen capitalists will arrive in Readestown on the 26th inst., to see you and the model.

"CHARLES KENSEL."

"They are coming, father, fifteen strong," said Frank, as he read the dispatch and passed it to his father.

"Who are coming?"

"Kensel and his syndicate."

"The deuce!"

"Yes—to see the model of the new air-ship."

Frank Reade, Sr., read the dispatch, and then looked at his son.

"That's quite a crowd," he remarked.

"Yes," said Frank, "and every one of them a millionaire."

"What shall we do with them?"

"Take them to the Reade House, which is as good a hotel as any in the West. We can give a banquet there and have some of our best citizens present as invited guests."

"That's so, and we need not crowd our families with them."

"No, not in the least."

"They will be here in five days?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go down to the hotel and engage rooms for the party."

"All right. I'll have the shop arranged so it can be used as an exhibition room. There is ample room there when the lumber is moved out. I'll arrange seats for about twenty people and let the syndicate see the model work."

Mr. Reade, Sr., went down to the Reade House, the best hotel in the town, and engaged quarters for the fifteen millionaires who were coming on from New York.

On the day the New Yorkers were to arrive, Frank and his father met them at the depot with five carriages.

A gentleman of slender build, florid complexion, and brown mustache and beard, stepped off the cars, followed by fourteen other gentlemen.

Frank stepped forward and said:

"I am Frank Reade—you are Mr. Kensel, are you not?"

"Yes," replied the New Yorker, grasping his hand and shaking it warmly.

"This is my father," said Frank, introducing the elder Reade.

The two men shook hands, and then a general introduction all round took place.

They were all driven to the Reade House, and given the rooms that had been assigned them.

That evening Frank and his father spent at the hotel, getting acquainted with the New Yorkers. In a little while they all felt that they had been acquainted a long time.

Frank related many stories of adventure in distant parts of the world.

"We have all read the story of your travels and adventures," said Kensel, "and enjoyed the narrative very much indeed. What has become of Barney and Pomp?"

"They are here, both married and settled down into steady old farmers."

"They are great characters," remarked one of the bankers.

"They are, indeed," returned Frank, "and the most faithful men I ever met with in all my life. They are typical of their race, and when you have seen them you will agree with me."

"Shall we see them?" another asked.

"Oh, yes. I'll introduce them to you all tomorrow evening, when we shall see the model of the new air-ship work."

The next day Frank and his father drove the visitors about the town, showing them the finest residences and business houses of the place.

In the evening they all repaired to the workshop of the young inventor, accompanied by a half dozen or more of the prominent business men of the town.

Frank had arranged seats in one half of the shop, so that every spectator present could hear and see all that was said and done.

In front of them was a table on which stood a model of the new air-ship, about four feet in length.

The bankers stared at the little beauty with unfeigned interest.

It was different from the other air-ships in many respects. It had but one rotoscope, or lifter, whereas the old ones had two. Then the rudder was behind instead of before, as in the others.

But we will let the young inventor explain it, as he did to the millionaires who were present.

"This is a perfect working model, gentlemen," he said, as he took his stand by the table on which the model rested, "of the new air-ship which is to be built. It differs from the others I have made in many respects. You will see that by casting your eyes at the pictures on the wall on the left there. The bottom of the old ones was more like that of a skiff, whereas this one is nearly straight, with a prow not very dissimilar to that of a sea-going ship. It has a cabin with accommodations for six persons—that is the ship, not the model—and a lifting and carrying capacity of about 1,500 pounds. The motive power is electricity. Two powerful batteries, inclosed in a chest just abaft the center are controlled by these little silver knobs and cranks here. The same principle that applies to ships applies to the navigation of the air, with a single exception of the lifting power. Gravitation has always been the one great obstacle in the way of a successful air-ship. I have the lifting power here—this tall mast in the center, which resembles an umbrella in many respects, opens when it revolves, and the leaves work upon the principle of the old Dutch wind-mill. To increase the number of revolutions is to mount higher, and vice versa. I will now show you how it works. First, I touch this little knob here, marked 'Rotoscope,' and the battery beneath at once sets it to revolving. There! you see it spread out like an umbrella! Now, see it rise—up she goes! I hold to this string to keep control of it."

The little model rose up as gracefully as a butterfly. Frank held it to it by means of a cord.

"Now I'll pull it down and touch the motive power," he said, drawing it down so as to reach up and touch the knob that controlled the propeller wheel behind. The wheel had three flukes or blades, of the same shape as those used by ocean ships.

The propeller began to revolve, and the beautiful little model pulled against the cord as if it wanted to go away.

"Now I'll set the rudder which projects beyond the propeller," continued Frank, "and that gives it the circular route around the room. See how gracefully it moves around! You see now how

it can be steered even in strong currents of air. It can even go against the wind, as ships go against the tide."

As the little model sailed gracefully around the room the syndicate of capitalists and spectators burst into enthusiastic applause.

"It is a grand success!" cried one.

"I never saw anything like it!" exclaimed another.

"Wonderful!" ejaculated a third.

"Three cheers for the inventor!" yelled a fourth, and the cheers were given with an energy that came near lifting the roof off the shop.

Round and round the room the little beauty sailed, rising and falling in response to the slightest touch of the master mind that controlled it. Every man in the room watched it as it sailed noiselessly about, and then looked admiringly at the young man whose inventive genius had brought him both fame and fortune.

At last Frank fastened the cord to a screw on the table, and let the model sail around the room whilst he entered into an animated description of the electric machinery that gave so much power for so little weight.

"It is the motive power of the future," he said. "Steam will give way to it, and thus the motive power of the world will become completely revolutionized."

After the lecture, which the bankers declared to be the most interesting one they ever listened to, Barney and Pomp were introduced.

The bankers crowded around to shake hands with them.

"Pomp, old man," said Kensel, grasping the dorky's hand and shaking it warmly, "your name is known all over the country, for you have been with Mr. Reade in all his adventures."

"Yes—dat's er fac," said Pomp, and the entire party laughed. "I've been wid 'im all de time, sah."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "an' it's meself as wur there, too."

"Dat's er fac," Barney. Dat Irisher don't git left nowhar."

The bankers laughed, and one of them asked Pomp if he would like to go on another voyage.

"Ise done gone an' done it now, sah," said Pomp, shaking his head in a very grave manner.

"Done what?"

"Got married, sah."

"Oh!" and the crowd yelled.

"Barney is married too, sah," said Pomp.

"Oh, is he?"

"Yes, sah, he is."

"Faith, an' it's thrue for you, Pomp," said Barney, who overheard the remark.

"I hope you are both happy and contented in your domestic relations," said Kensel.

"Av coorse," replied Barney. "Bridget rules the ranche, an' it's meself that's proud av me boss."

"Good! I like a man who is proud of his wife!"

"Bedad, an' it's meself as loikes the wife that's proud av her ould man."

"Yes, you are a lucky dog, Barney. If you write the history of your life some day you'll make a big fortune."

"Sure, an' I would ave me wolfe wouldn't rade it."

At that the crowd roared with laughter.

"Give me your hand, Barney!" exclaimed one of the bankers. "I think you have uttered the sentiment of every one present. If every one of us had to write the history of our lives, we would be sure to leave out some things which we would not care to have our wives to read. You are a philosopher, Barney. Long life to you."

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW AIR-SHIP IS READY TO SAIL—THE BATTERIES OF THE WIVES.

THE night after the exhibition of the model of the new air-ship Frank and his father entertained the bankers at a sumptuous banquet in the house of the elder inventor.

The dinner was a grand affair.

A dozen prominent citizens sat down with the visitors, and for three hours there was a feast of reason and flow of soul that made the New Yorkers open their eyes in astonishment.

"They understand these things out here as well as we do in New York," remarked Kensel to one of his party.

"Indeed they do. The West is breezy in its way, but they are right up to the rack whenever anything is to be done."

The banquet ended and the visitors returned to the hotel.

The next day they were ready to attend to the business they had on hand—to sign a contract with Frank to reimburse him for any outlay of money he might make in building the air-ship, and to allow him to retain the ownership of it

after the survey of the proposed railroad route had been made.

That done, the party took leave of our hero and returned to New York.

Frank went to work immediately to build an air-ship on the style of the model that had been exhibited.

He telegraphed to Chicago to the skilled workmen who had constructed the machinery for his other inventions.

They came promptly, and he showed them the model of the air-ship he wanted to build, and told them to go to work and make the necessary machinery in accordance with the specifications which he gave them then and there.

Then he went to work constructing the wood-work in the shop where the exhibition of the model took place. He worked like a Trojan, and by degrees the air-ship took on both shape and beauty.

Barney and Pomp held many consultations over the matter.

They both knew that Frank would never think of making a voyage to any part of the world without them. But they had now formed new ties that held them to new duties at home.

Barney was of a roving disposition, however, and Pomp soon found out that he was not only willing to go, but quite anxious to do so.

That set him to thinking, but he did not say anything to his dusky partner about it. It was only by accident that Dinah heard that the great inventor was building another air-ship.

"Pomp," she said to him one day, "Mr. Reade am er buildin' anuder flyin' ship."

"Dat's er fac', honey," he replied.

"Whar's he gwine, Pomp?"

"I doan no, honey, an' dat's de trufe."

"Is Barney gwine wid 'im?"

"Bress yer heart, honey, dis chile doan no nuffin' 'bout dat."

"Dar ain't no nigger gwine wid him?"

"I doan know, chile," he answered. "Dis yere nigger is too ole ter go er flyin' around like er bird."

"Dat's so, Pomp. Ef one nigger goes dar'll be two of 'em, an' dat's er fac'."

"Yes, chile."

She was half suspicious of him, and Pomp was conscious of it.

But he said nothing to give her any reason to think that he took any thought of the matter.

The truth is, he did not know where Frank intended to go, as the young inventor had said nothing to him about it. He had picked up enough from the visitors from New York to suspect that he was going on a grand enterprise that would bring him both fame and fortune.

Pomp had married a woman who took great pleasure in bossing him in every conceivable way. He was quite fond of her, as she made a splendid housekeeper, and kept things about home looking bright and cheerful. But he got awful tired of her lectures sometimes.

As for Barney, he wanted a change, and believed that an absence from home for a few weeks would really do him good.

But he said nothing about it to anybody, preferring to wait till the air-ship was ready before mentioning it to his wife.

Time passed, and the winter came with its snows and chilling blasts. The young inventor worked with a will, and when the green grass came again and flowers began to bloom the new air-ship came with them.

It was finished, and a marvel of beauty and inventive ingenuity it was. Barney and Pomp slipped into the shop every day to get a look at it.

"Whar yer gwine now, Marse Frank?" Pomp asked one day.

"Where do you want to go, Pomp?" the young inventor asked.

"I doan want ter go nowhar," he replied, looking slyly around at Barney.

"Where would you like to go, Barney?"

"Ter Ireland, bedad!" exclaimed the patriotic Irishman.

"That's the Irishman all over," said Frank, laughing. "I suppose Pomp would like to go down South where he was born and see the old cabin once more."

Pomp looked at the young man and shook his head. He didn't know what to say. He was thinking of what Dinah had said, and didn't want Frank to know that she was the cause of his reluctance to go.

"Wouldn't you like to go South, Pomp?"

"I doan keer 'bout dat, Marse Frank," said Pomp. "I see er gittin' too ole for dat now, sah."

"Too old! Why, you old rascal, you are as spry as I am at this moment."

Pomp grinned.

He knew he was spry enough.

He didn't care to say that his wife was the cause of his peculiar hesitation at this particular time.

But Frank suspected the cause, and said:

"I know where your trouble is, old man. Just leave her to me, and I'll manage her. Don't say a word. You and Barney must go with me. It will be worth a thousand dollars to each of you."

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Av Bridget opens her mouth, sure an' I'll put me fut in it."

"Just leave it to me. Don't say a word about it."

"Whar you gwine, Marse Frank?"

"To Mexico. Two gentlemen will go with us. We are going to find a route across Mexico for a railroad which those rich New Yorkers are going to build."

That relieved Pomp very much.

He had been to Mexico in one of the old air-ships, and knew all about the amount of danger they would have to encounter in that part of the world.

"You are not afraid to go to Mexico, are you?"

"No, sah. I ain't erfraild ter go nowhar," he replied.

"Would you like to go?"

Pomp made no reply, as he heard his wife calling him. She had come over to tell him that one of the cows was choked with a turnip. He left in a hurry to try to save the animal.

Frank wrote to Kensel in New York that the air-ship was finished and ready to start on the trip.

Kensel telegraphed that himself and one of the engineers would start from New York in three days to accompany him.

Frank had ordered from Chicago all the necessary supplies for the trip. His experience on similar voyages enabled him to calculate just what they would need and how much.

In the meantime, both Barney and Pomp had remained quiet as regarded their own interest in the proposed trip.

Kensel and a man of the name of Sallinger, an engineer, arrived from New York, and were taken to the home of the young inventor, where they could be on hand every day in the preparations for the departure of the new air-ship.

Kensel and Sallinger inspected the new air-ship with the closest scrutiny.

"It's new to us," said Kensel to Frank, "and it's natural that we should feel a little nervous about sailing through the air in any kind of vessel."

"Of course," replied Frank; "but you can overcome your nervousness in a measure by recollecting that I have made a number of such trips with perfect safety to all on board."

"Yes, that's so, yet I can't help feeling a little nervous about it," remarked Sallinger.

"Oh, you will soon get over that," and Frank laughed good-naturedly.

"How many will go?" Kensel asked.

"Five in all."

"What is the capacity of the ship?"

"We have accommodations for six, with a lifting capacity of about 1,500 pounds."

The evening after the arrival of Sallinger and Kensel Pomp's wife suspected that Frank was trying to persuade him to go in the air-ship with the party.

She called her husband to account, but could get nothing out of him.

"You're ain't er gwine ter do no mo' flyin', Pomp," she said to him, in tones that were meant to be well understood.

"Dat's er fac', honey," said Pomp, without looking up at his wife. "I ain't no bird."

"Nor angel, eider," she added.

"Dat's er fac'."

Mrs. Pomp concluded to go over and see Barney's wife, and warn her of the danger she was in of losing her husband for a time.

Bridget at once went for Barney and told him he should not go unless she went too.

"Bedad, thin," said Barney, "yer won't be after goin', Mrs. O'Shea."

"Sure, thin, it's at home we'll stay," she retorted.

Thus it went on for three days, till Barney went to Frank and told him that he could do nothing with Bridget—that she and Pomp's wife had pledged themselves to prevent either of their husbands going away.

"You don't know how to manage a woman, Barney," said Frank, laughing.

"Faith, an' didn't ould Adam have the devil's luck wid his wiffe?" said the Irishman.

"So he did, but she was the only woman he ever saw, and she happened to be too much for him. Just set Bridget and Dinah to abusing each other, and then you and Pomp will have a little peace."

"Och, but it's the wise hid yez have, Mister Frank. Sure, an' Bridget will pull all the wool straight from the naygur's hid."

"Tell Bridget that Dinah hinted to you that if she were you she'd go in spite of all Bridget might say. That'll be enough."

Pomp came in just as Barney was about to leave, and Frank gave him the same hint he had given to Barney.

Pomp grinned from ear to ear, and went out to return home to give out the hints he had received.

The moment Pomp entered Dinah asked:

"When am dat ship gwine to sail, Pomp?"

"Lor, honey, I doan no."

"Is Barney er gwine ter go?"

"I doan no, honey."

"Does he want ter go?"

"I doan no dat, nider. Bridget tole me ter git in an' go an' say nuffin er bout it ter nobody."

Dinah sprang up, and cried out:

"She tole yer ter go?"

"Yes, honey, dat she did, suah."

"I see gwine ter broke her neck for dat, sure's you lib, Pomp."

"Den de sheriff will broke youse neck, honey, an' Pomp'll be er lone widder."

Dinah said no more.

She went through her house-work with a savage energy that made Pomp grin and chuckle.

He knew then that Frank had told the truth when he said that she would give him a rest after that.

After a little while he went out and made his way over to the shop where the air-ship was waiting only for her crew and passengers.

There he met Barney, who had just been putting a flea in Bridget's ear in regard to what he alleged Dinah had advised him to do.

They both grinned and shook heads. They uttered not a word, as both well understood the other.

Kensel and Sallinger, together with Frank, had moved their effects on board, and were ready to follow as soon as the air-ship was ready to rise.

Suddenly Bridget burst into the yard of the shop, and seizing Barney by the collar, exclaimed:

"Sure, an' would ye be afther lavin' me a poor widdy, ye spalpeen?"

"Och, Bridget, it's off ye nut ye are," said Barney, trying to pull loose from her.

"Faith, thin, come home wid me an' behave yerself," she replied.

"Pomp, yer brack rascal!" cried Dinah, entering the yard at the moment. "Youse am gwine home wid me, you is!"

"Dinah, honey, go long wid yer foolishness. Don't make a fool ob yerself."

Dinah caught sight of Bridget clinging to Barney, and thought she had come to urge Pomp to go that Barney's services might be dispensed with.

Bridget was laboring under the same opinion herself in regard to Dinah, and so the two women glared at each other like two tigresses at bay.

"Sure, an' it's the thafe av the wurrauld yez are, Dinah," hissed Bridget.

"You'se shet youse mouf afo' I broke it, Bridget O'Shea," returned Dinah.

"Och, do yez moind ther naygur!" cried Bridget. "Sure, an' it's not for the loikes av her that my man wud be afther goin' away," and the fiery Irishwoman made a dash at Dinah and buried her fingers in her wool ere the latter could realize that she had a fight on hand.

"Whoop!" yelled Bridget.

"Lef go dar!" screamed Dinah, and in another moment the two women were engaged in a clawing match that would have shamed a couple of belligerent wild cats.

"Howly mither av Moses!" exclaimed Barney, as he saw the two women tearing each other to pieces.

"Hi, dar!" yelled Pomp, anxious to put a stop to the row.

"I say, Kensel," cried Frank, "you hold Bridget and I'll look after Dinah."

Kensel seized Bridget round the waist and Frank caught Dinah in the same latitude. Then they tried to pull them apart.

But they were fast in each other's hair and screeching like two maniacs.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW FRANK MADE PEACE AMONG THE WOMEN—BARNEY AND POMP SAIL IN THE AIR-SHIP.

The two women were mad enough to kill each other.

They shrieked and screamed and tore each other's clothes with tigerish fury.

But they were finally pulled apart, and then they glared at each other as if they meant fight to the death.

"You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said Frank.

"She tried ter send my old man away," said Dinah.

"Sure, an' the naygur is a lolar," said Bridget.

"Lave me get at her, an' it's the loi she'll ate." Barney and Pomp looked on, not knowing whether to take any hand in the fight or not.

"You ought to go home and hide yourselves for a week," said Frank. "I think the best thing you can do is to send Barney and Pomp away for a month, and—"

"Dat lazy Pomp ain't er gwine," said Dinah, very emphatically.

"Sure, an' it's at home Barney will stay," put in Bridget.

"You are two very foolish women," said Frank, "and ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Mrs. Reade is as good as either of you, and loves her husband as much as any wife can, yet she consents for him to go because it puts money in his pocket. Now, Barney and Pomp will get \$1,000 apiece for going on this trip. You are trying to keep your husbands from making money. They will give you each \$100 for pin-money, to do with as you please."

"Am dat so?" Dinah asked, looking over at Pomp, who was by no means very liberal in spending money.

"Of course it is. To prove it, I'll give you both the money now before we start, so you may have a good time while they are gone," and he drew a roll of bills from his pocket and counted out the money and handed it to them.

They were both overjoyed at having so much pin-money, and in a few moments they were smiling.

"Shake hands, now," said Frank, "and go home. We are not going to leave just yet."

The two women shook hands and left the yard together, looking as smiling as if they were trying to mash the handsome Adolphus Sallinger, the handsome engineer from New York, who had been a spectator of the scene.

"That was well done, Mr. Reade," said Sallinger, as he saw the two women depart in peace.

"Bedad, but it's a great head he has," said Barney.

"Dat's er fae," put in Pomp.

"You certainly know how to manage women," remarked Kensel.

"Well, if he can manage an air-ship he ought to know how to manage a woman," said Sallinger, "for both are high-flyers."

Kensel looked hard at his companion for a moment or two, as if astonished at the tremendous effort, and said:

"I wouldn't attempt such heavy jokes as that again, Sallinger."

"Why not?"

"Because the air-ship can't carry such heavy things as that."

"Have a cigar," said Sallinger, tendering his cigar-case. "You are entitled to one."

"Thanks. I always take what is due me," and Kensel took a cigar.

"I never can get half what is due me," remarked Sallinger, as he put up the cigar-case.

"How is that?"

"Owing to lack of comprehension on the part of many people," was the reply.

Frank laughed.

"He is coming back on you, Kensel."

"Yes; here, I return you your cigar," and Kensel tendered the weed to him.

"Smoke it. It will enable you to comprehend a few things you otherwise might not understand."

After a good laugh all around, Frank said to Barney and Pomp:

"We are about ready to start. Go home and make peace with your wives. We shall start at noon."

Barney and Pomp returned home, and the others repaired to the house, where they made their final preparations.

At noon they were all promptly on hand, together with a few neighbors who had come to see them off.

The double doors of the work-shop was thrown open, and the air-ship brought out and placed in the yard.

Kensel and Sallinger were quite nervous as they shook hands with Frank Reade, Sr., and the others just before stepping on board.

"How will she stand a cyclone?" Sallinger asked.

"She won't stand it at all," replied Frank. "She will have to travel with it."

Sallinger stopped and looked first at Kensel and then at the young inventor.

Frank smiled.

"That is where our safety would lie," remarked the young inventor. "By going with it and keeping up a good distance from the earth we would soon ride through it."

That was lucid enough, and Sallinger sat down alongside of Kensel with a little resignation.

At the proper time Frank cried out:

"Good-bye till we come back!" and then touched the rotascope knob.

The steel mast at once began to revolve, and the leaves of the rotascope opened like the folds of an immense umbrella.

The dust rose in a cloud from the earth all around the air-ship.

Faster and faster went the rotascope, and in another minute the air-ship began to rise.

Barney and Pomp sprang up and began cheering and waving their hats.

Kensel and Sallinger waved theirs also, catching the enthusiasm of the other two, and in a little while the air-ship was a thousand feet or more above the earth.

Then Kensel sat down, saying:

"It makes me dizzy to look down at the earth."

"So it does me," said Sallinger, sitting down by his side.

"Look off toward the horizon until you get used to it," suggested Frank. "You will soon get over it."

They followed his advice, and in a little while found that they could look in any direction they wished without experiencing any ill effects from it.

"How much higher will you go?" Sallinger asked, growing uneasy.

"Oh, we can go as high as we please," was the reply. "One, two, three, four or five miles, if you wish."

"I guess we are high enough now," remarked Sallinger.

"What! Why we are not more than a half mile high!"

"Well, isn't that high enough?"

"That depends upon how high you want to go. A mile higher will give you a better view of things."

"A better view of the sky, I suppose," said Sallinger.

"No, of the world."

"I don't know about that, unless you go upon the principle that distance lends enchantment to the view. As for me, I would rather have a little closer view of the world below."

"You are not interested in the world above, then?" said Frank.

"Not just now. I've got some surveys to make in the world below first."

"So you have; but we'll have to fly a great many miles before you can get to work."

"Well, don't take me too far above my work. I am not a bit proud."

But he kept going higher and higher, and then Kensel looked at Frank and said:

"Suppose you wait till we are a little used to high flying before you sail to such altitude?"

"Very well; we won't go any higher," said Frank, touching the knob that regulated the evolutions of the rotascope. Then he set the propeller going, and the air-ship moved off in a southerly direction.

The day was a balmy one, with but little wind blowing. The air-ship moved along with good speed, every part of the machinery working smoothly, without any friction whatever that could be detected.

"This is the triumph of inventive genius," said Kensel, in a burst of admiration at the grand panorama spread out before him.

"Yes," added Sallinger; "I never thought when I was reading the story of the air-ship that I would ever be a passenger on one of them."

"How many miles per hour are we making now?" Kensel asked.

"I think we are making about ten miles," said Frank, "though I can tell more accurately after I have examined the instrument."

He made the examination and found that they were making about ten and a half miles per hour.

"What is the best speed you can make?" Kensel asked.

"That depends upon the speed of the wind."

"But without any wind?"

"About twenty miles, I think."

"That's fast sailing."

"Yes; and I would not undertake to run that fast for any length of time, for fear of an accident."

"This is fast enough," remarked Sallinger.

"If an accident should happen, what would be the result?"

"Don't mention it," replied Frank.

"Why not?"

"Because it makes me shudder to think about it."

Sallinger himself shuddered, and dropped the subject.

CHAPTER V.

POMP AND SALLINGER—THE CAMP.

ALL the afternoon the air-ship sailed steadily southward, passing over towns, villages, rivers and many beautiful farms.

Both the New Yorkers were in ecstasies of delight over the grand view of the country.

"It seems more like a dream than a reality," remarked Kensel.

"So it does," assented Sallinger.

"You will both soon become used to it," said Frank. "I don't mind it now any more than you would mind driving a horse along that dusty road down there."

Both men took glasses and looked through them at distant objects. They saw many excited people gazing up at the air-ship, as if they were at a loss to understand what it was.

"Just look at the people at that farm-house down there!" cried Sallinger. "They are down on their knees—the last one of them."

"Oh, I've seen that often," said Frank. "A great many ignorant people think we are supernatural, and therefore feel alarmed when they see us."

"Did you ever pass over a Methodist camp-meeting?"

"Yes, several times."

"What was the effect?"

"Very exciting. But generally the people knew we were coming, and were on the lookout for us."

"Yes, I suppose so. Just look at the people in that village down there! The entire population has turned out to look at us."

Our heroes gazed down at the upturned faces of the excited villagers, and, by the aid of powerful field glasses, could see some very pretty faces among the women.

When night came on Frank began to look around for a stopping place.

"We want to stop where there is plenty of water so we can have fish for supper and a swim in the morning."

"Just the thing," said Sallinger. "I would like to have a swim."

But the stars came out long before any river was seen.

"We may as well keep on now," said Frank, "and sail all night. We will be that much nearer our objective point in the morning."

"But will the machinery stand so much wear?" Kensel asked.

"Oh, yes. No trouble about that."

"But what will you do for sleep?"

"I'll have my sleep."

"And let the ship run herself?"

"Oh, no. Barney and Pomp will relieve me by turns."

"I—I—don't think I can sleep any to-night," said Sallinger, a very scared look on his face.

Frank laughed.

"Barney and Pomp have both run an air-ship all night long," he said. "Don't you suppose that I value my life as highly as you do yours?"

"I suppose you do."

"Very well, then; console yourself with the thought that you can afford to take the same risk that I do."

"That's good philosophy," remarked Kensel, "and I am going to act on it."

Sallinger was silenced for the time, but he was not feeling very comfortable—that was plainly to be seen.

He did not lie down in his berth until he had seen Pomp running the air-ship for nearly an hour.

Then he retired to his berth and slept soundly till called up the next morning by Pomp.

He sprang up and looked out.

The air-ship was resting quietly on the ground on the banks of a river, and a fire was burning brightly not twenty feet away.

The savory odors of coffee and broiling fish greeted him.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed. "Where are we, Pomp?"

"We're heah, sah," replied Pomp.

"Here! Where is that?"

"Right heah, sah, by de ribber."

"Yes, but what river is it?"

"I doan know, sah."

"Where's Mr. Reade and— Hello, Kensel!"

"Hello, Sallinger," returned Kensel, who came forward from the river with a big trout fluttering in his hand. "What's the matter with you this morning? You sleep like a log."

"I didn't get to sleep till very late. Why didn't you wake me?"

"Because you didn't ask me to. I thought you were enjoying your sleep too well to care to get out early."

"How long have you been up?"

"About an hour. I've caught a dozen fellows like this one. They almost come out of the water after the hook."

"Well, you fellows must have been very quiet in your movements not to have awakened me. I'll get even with you for it yet. I guess I can eat one of those fish for breakfast."

Just then Frank came back from the river.

"The water is a little too cold for a swim yet," he said. "I prefer to wait till we get further south."

They sat down to the adjustable table and ate heartily of broiled trout, coffee, eggs and butter.

When they prepared to resume their journey, Barney and Pomp soon replaced everything on board the air-ship, and then the young inventor sung out:

"All aboard!"

Two minutes later the air-ship began to rise. Up—it went, and when about half a mile up moved off in a southerly direction.

"Why do you go up so high, Mr. Reade?" Sallinger asked.

"For safety," was the reply.

Sallinger was puzzled.

"It seems to me you run into danger by doing so," he said.

"Oh, that's because you don't understand. If we went skimming along only a few hundred feet above the earth some fool with a gun in his hands would get frightened and give us a dose of lead."

"Don't say another word," said Sallinger. "That settles it. Go up as high as you please. I'd rather take my chances up above than down below."

Frank and Kensel laughed, and Sallinger added:

"A man is never too old to learn some things. I intend to find out things as I go long through life."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "A man what doan' kno nuffin' ain't got no sense."

Sallinger glared at the black man in astonishment for a moment, as if in doubt as to his meaning.

But ere he could utter a word both Frank and Kensel were actually rolling on the floor in uproarious merriment.

Pomp grinned, and Barney remarked:

"Ther naygur is fresh, sorr—he is."

"I should say so," said Sallinger. "The freshest old coon I ever saw."

"Doan' call me er coon, marsa," said Pomp, who particularly disliked that word when applied to one of his race.

Sallinger was about to make an angry reply, when Frank said:

"You misunderstood him, Sallinger; Pomp meant to be complimentary to you."

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac," put in our sable hero.

"Bedad, but a naygur niver—"

"Shet up, yer Irisher," said Pomp, turning quickly on Barney. "Doan' youse give me none of yer lip."

"Faith, an' isn't it fresh he is!"

Pomp began to scowl, and in another minute they would have come to blows, had not Frank spoke up and ordered Barney to the rear of the air-ship on some trifling duty.

Barney went back, and kept chuckling to himself till Pomp was mad enough to butt him overboard.

"I have to watch Barney and Pomp all the time we are out this way," remarked Frank. "They are the best friends in the world, and yet I never saw two men more prompt to pitch into each other than they are."

"Which is the best man?" Kensel asked.

"They are pretty well matched till Pomp uses his head as a battering ram. That always knocks Barney out."

"Do they ever attempt to use weapons on each other?"

"Never but once. Then I told them that I would shoot the one who used a weapon on the other. That put a stop to it."

"They don't seem to be very quarrelsome," remarked Sallinger.

"They are not. They can't resist the temptation to give each other a dig to raise the laugh on him. They are game, though, and will fight to the death against any odds. I'd rather go into a fight with them to stand by and back me than any two men I ever knew."

"That is saying a great deal," said Kensel.

"So it is, but I have been in some terrible tight places with them. They have saved my life more than once out on the plains when we were attacked by Indians."

"I would like to hear the story of some of their adventures," said Sallinger.

"You shall hear several of them after we get well started in our enterprise," replied Frank.

"Do you know where we are now?" Kensel asked.

"In Southern Missouri, I think. To-morrow we will be in the Indian Territory."

"It wouldn't do to stop anywhere around there, eh?"

"Oh, yes. The Indians of the Territory are quite tame. When we strike the Comanche country we shall have to be very cautious."

"You have been there before, have you?"

"Yes—and rescued two young girls from them several years ago."

"Would they know you?"

"No."

They stopped on the banks of another river that night, and had another good time fishing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INDIAN VILLAGE—THE MEXICAN GIRL.

THEY were up bright and early the next morning. Frank shot a deer before breakfast.

"That will give us all the venison steak we can eat," he said, "and we can have two or three hours' fishing while Pomp is cooking the meat."

"Let's hunt for more deer," suggested Kensel.

"All right."

They went down the river a short distance, and pretty soon saw another deer.

All three fired at the same time.

The deer fell dead.

"That's the first deer I ever killed," remarked Sallinger.

"Did you kill him?" Kensel asked.

"Of course I did. Didn't you see me shoot?"

"Yes, and didn't you see me shoot, too?"

"No—did you shoot?"

"Yes—and I don't think you hit 'im."

"Oh, maybe you don't think I can hit anything," sneered Sallinger.

"There's a rabbit," said Frank, pointing to a buck rabbit about fifty yards away under a clump of bushes. "Both of you try your luck at him."

They both aimed at the rabbit and fired.

To their surprise, not to say disgust, the rabbit sprang up and ran away as fast as his nimble feet could carry him.

"Which of you killed him, gentlemen?" Frank asked, a smile playing around his mouth.

"What's the matter with this gun, anyhow?" Sallinger asked, looking suspiciously at the rifle he held in his hand.

"The gun is all right," said Frank. "You want to learn how to handle it, that's all."

"Let's look at the deer," suggested Kensel.

"If I can't hit anything as big as that I'll never shoot another gun."

They went to the deer, and Frank made an inspection.

"He is hit in three places," he said.

"Of course he is," remarked Sallinger. "I can hit a deer at that distance with a stone."

"But you are not good at rabbit-shooting," said Frank.

"There's a big difference between a rabbit and a deer, Mr. Reade."

"Yes, but there shouldn't be, so far as the hunter is concerned. He should bring down whatever he shoots at, even though it be but a sparrow."

"That's so," said Kensel. "I've seen enough of Western life to know that."

"I'd like to try my luck on another rabbit," remarked Sallinger, looking around as if in search of something to try his skill as a marksman on.

"You'll find something to shoot at soon. There's plenty of game in these woods," and Frank led the way farther down the stream.

They went about a mile below the camp, and then returned, to find that Barney and Pomp had nearly finished cooking the venison hams.

In a little while they were off again, the air-ship ascending with the greatest ease and rapidity.

"You are going south-easterly," remarked Kensel, looking at the compass.

"Yes—we are going toward Mexico now. Due South would take us to Texas."

"I believe you are right. Where shall we strike the Rio Grande?"

"Somewhere about Laredo, I guess," replied Frank.

"I am anxious to see that famed river," remarked Sallinger.

"You won't see it to-day."

"To-morrow, then?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Whether we get there or not."

"Oh!"

They passed over into the Indian Territory and Kensel and Sallinger at once became interested in everything they saw below them.

They saw a village with houses, not in any way unlike those seen in the States, and Sallinger exclaimed:

"Pshaw! These are civilized Indians. I want to see the unadulterated hair-lifter."

"You will probably see some before we reach the Rio Grande, and thank God that you are not on foot or horseback."

"Well, they are the ones I want to see. I don't propose to offer them a lock of my hair, or even

shake hands with them. But I want to see them."

"Just look at that farm out there," remarked Kensel, pointing to a well-stocked and well-tilled farm below them on the right.

"Do you mean to tell me that an Indian runs that?" Sallinger asked.

"Yes," said Frank, "and I don't think he is a very good farmer at that. I can show you some Indian farming that can beat white men clean out of their boots."

When night came on they settled down on a rancho owned by a Cherokee Indian.

He had no end of cattle, and his barns were full of the products of the farm.

In his employ were about a score of white laborers, all of whom came out to see the air-ship and its managers.

A few Indians came around, but they were so unlike the wild specimens that even Barney and Pomp felt disposed to drive them away.

The next day they left at sunrise, and pushed on into the Comanche country, in North Texas.

About noon they struck a picturesque Indian village—a regular wigwam settlement.

"Ah! They are regular hair-lifters!" exclaimed Kensel, gazing at the village through a field glass.

"Comanches," said Frank.

"Can we go down there?" Sallinger asked.

"Oh, yes."

"But can we get away again?"

"That's a question."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better keep away."

"Yes."

Pomp suddenly cried out:

"Look at dem Injuns!"

They looked down at the wigwam village and saw the women, children and old men pouring out of their quarters to gaze up at the air-ship.

Frank looked through his field-glass and saw that not a single warrior was in the village.

"Oh, we can go down there," he said. "The warriors are all away on a hunt."

He touched the knob that controlled the rotoscope, and lessened the revolutions to such speed as to cause the air-ship to sink toward the earth.

Sallinger and Kensel looked down at the village as if all the interest they had in life was centered there.

As the air-ship neared the earth the Comanche women and children began to screech and give other evidences of great terror.

They ran about in every direction, making the welkin ring with their cries. The old men of the village seemed to be utterly demoralized, as they too ran about as if as much frightened as the squaws were.

But when they all saw that the air-ship was going to settle down right in the streets of the village, the old men, women, and children fled through the timber toward the river, leaving everything to the mercy of the strangers.

"They are the worst scared crowd I ever saw," remarked Sallinger.

"Yes," said Frank. "Ignorant and superstitious people cannot understand how we can sail through the air as we do, and so they look upon us in the light of the supernatural."

About half a hundred dogs kept up a most incessant barking. But the Indians kept away. They would not trust themselves within speaking distance of the new-comers.

"Do you want to go through the village and look into the wigwams?" Frank asked, turning to Sallinger and Kensel.

"Any danger?" Sallinger asked.

"None whatever. They are scared nearly to death."

"Let's see them, then."

Frank left Barney and Pomp in charge of the air-ship, and led the other two through the village.

In every wigwam they found scalps hanging up as trophies of the war-path.

"You see the Comanches are still a bad crowd," said Frank, as he pointed to the scalps.

"They don't wear the scalps about as they did fifty or one hundred years ago, but they keep them to show around among themselves. They are the worst lot of all the red rascals on the continent."

Sallinger and Kensel shuddered as they looked at the scalps—all of which were dried and shriveled up—and wondered why such brutes were permitted to live.

Besides scalps they saw splendid buffalo skins in the wigwams, blankets and other things for comfort. Their cooking utensils were, however, of the crudest kind.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, as he entered one of the wigwams and found a young Mexican girl lying on a buffalo skin asleep.

She sprang up, and cried out in pure Spanish:

"Who are you, senors?"
 "We are Americans," returned Frank, in the same tongue. "What are you doing here, senorita?"

The young girl was very beautiful as she gazed at them in unfeigned astonishment. She brushed her long hair from her face with her hands, and said:

"I am a captive; have been here two weeks."
 "Where do you live?"
 "On the Rio Grande, below Laredo."

"How came you here?"
 "I was captured when out riding one evening. So little noise was made that I don't think my people know where I am, or that the Indians have me in their clutches."

"How have they treated you?"
 "The chief has been trying to force me to become his wife."

"And you don't wish to?"

"No, senor."

"Do you wish to go home?"

"Yes, senor."

"Come with us, then."

She quickly gathered up such things as belonged to her and followed them out of the wigwam. A moment later they were startled by wild yells and rifle shots from the air-ship.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESCUE OF THE MAIDEN—BARNEY AND POMP DEFEND THE AIR-SHIP.

At the sound of the first shot Frank stopped and listened.

He knew the Comanche yell as well as he knew the English language.

Another yell, and another small volley of rifle shots.

"The warriors have returned," he said, turning to Sallinger and Kensel, "and Barney and Pomp are having some fun with them. We have our revolvers and must fight our way back to the air-ship," and he drew a brace of revolvers as he spoke.

Sallinger and Kensel did likewise.

They were pale, but never flinched.

Both had served in the armies of the Union, and knew what it was to face bullets.

The Mexican girl turned to Frank, and said:

"If we go up behind the wigwams we may pass unseen to the woods."

She had not seen or heard of the air-ship.

"We don't want to go to the timber," said Frank. "Come on; we'll take the rascals in the rear, and give 'em a dose of lead."

He ran forward, followed by the others, till the end of the row of wigwams was reached.

There they came in sight of about a score of Comanche warriors, who had just returned from a hunt down the river.

The redskins had not heard of the air-ship, and did not know what to make of it when they saw it resting on the ground in the village.

But, Indian-like, they started to take possession of it.

Barney and Pomp warned them off.

They drew their weapons for a fight.

Barney and Pomp got out the repeating-rifles and gave them a volley that laid two of them out.

Then the red rascals yelled and fired in return. Barney and Pomp yelled, too, and began to have fun with them.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Come on, ye blaggard, an' it's meself as kin bate the loife out o' ye!"

"Hi, dar, yer red niggers!" cried Pomp, aiming at one and breaking his arm. "Wha' for youse shoot at us?"

The next moment Frank and our three friends burst upon the dumfounded redskins and opened fire on them in their rear.

The Comanches made a dash for the timber. They didn't know how many whites might be in the village, and so they thought best to fall back and see what they could find out.

Just then Barney and Pomp saw them, and set up a shout.

Frank ran to the air-ship and helped the Mexican girl on board.

She looked around in the greatest amazement, not knowing what to make of the strange vessel. "Lead her into the cabin, Sallinger," said Frank, as he set the rotoscope in motion.

Sallinger could speak Spanish as well as any Spaniard. He took the girl's hand and led her into the cabin, where he told her to take a seat and not leave until called.

The next minute the ship began to rise.

The girl felt the motion, and sprang to her feet in great alarm.

"Keep quiet, senorita," he said, taking her by the hand to reassure her; "we are getting out of the way of the Indians."

"But we are going up in the air?"

"Yes, and out of harm's way."

She was terrified.

"We are in an air-ship, senorita," said Sallinger, "which sails through the air as well as other ships sail through the water."

He held on to her hand to reassure her till her fears were allayed.

Then he led her out of the cabin to let her see the village a half mile below, where the redskins were whooping and howling over the escape of their strange visitors.

She was so terrified that Kensel and Sallinger had to hold her for fear she would throw herself overboard.

Frank talked to her, saying:

"We will reach Laredo to-morrow, senorita, and then we will see that you are restored to your home."

"But this sailing through the air?" she cried. "I am dreaming. People who live on the earth do not fly."

"No, not as the birds do," said Frank, "nor do they swim as the fishes do, but they have ships that cross the ocean for all that. This is a ship to sail through the air, and you see that it does so with the greatest ease. I have been all over Mexico in one like it."

By degrees they succeeded in quieting the girl's fears, and then she sat down and gave them the particulars of her capture by the Indians.

It was the old, old story of a chief in search of a pretty young wife, which he could not find among his own people. But she had resisted until she was almost ready to give up in despair and destroy herself.

That evening the air-ship settled down on the banks of another stream where game was plentiful and the solitude invited repose.

The camp was soon pitched, and in a little while a sumptuous repast was prepared.

The girl was charmed.

They all showed her so much deference and sympathy that she really felt as if she would rather remain with them than return to her home on the banks of the Rio Grande.

Her name was Maria Sanchez. She said that her father was a small farmer on the American side of the river.

"What great people you Americans are!" she said. "You fly through the air like birds."

What won't you do next?"

"That is hard to say," said Frank, laughing. "We try to keep ahead of all the rest of the world in the arts and sciences."

"And you do. Those Indians must think you were from the skies."

"Yes—a great many white people think that when they see us for the first time."

"Did you make the ship?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "I am the first one who ever made an air-ship."

She looked at him in undisguised admiration for some time, and then asked:

"Are you married?"

"Yes, and am a father."

"How proud your wife must be of you," she remarked.

"We love each other very much," he said.

That night she occupied Frank's cabin, whilst he slept under the deck rolled in his blanket.

They were up early the next morning, and, after a hearty breakfast, set sail for the Rio Grande, which they expected to reach that day.

Maria Sanchez became as talkative as a parrot, and never let a minute pass without asking a question about something she saw or heard.

But she was so pretty, vivacious, and yet so artless, that our heroes grew to like her very much.

"Dar's de ribber!" cried Pomp, in the middle of the afternoon, as he espied the great river in the distance.

"Where? Where?" she exclaimed, growing very much excited.

"Ober dar," replied Pomp, pointing to a point straight ahead.

She looked, but could see nothing that looked like a river.

"Why, I don't see any river," she exclaimed.

"Nor I," said Sallinger.

Frank took out his field-glass and took a peep through it.

"The old man's eyes are good at long range," he remarked. "That is the river sure enough."

Kensel and Sallinger took a look at it through the glass.

"Please let me see it," pleaded Maria.

"Of course," said Frank. "I brought out the glass for that purpose, knowing what an interest you have in that old stream."

And he held the glass for her to use.

It took several minutes for her to understand how to use the glass. But the moment she caught sight of the river she uttered a cry of joy.

"Yes—yes, that's the Rio Grande!" she cried. "Oh, how I love its old red waters! They are

never clear, but that makes no difference. I love the Rio Grande."

Suddenly she cried out:

"Oh, I know where we are now! We are going below Laredo, and my home is not far away. I know that bend in the river, and— Oh, there's our home! That house away out there where you see the smoke curling up. That is where we have lived for three years. My father came there from Mexico three years ago."

The young girl was overjoyed at seeing her dear old home once more, and was never tired of talking about it.

"But you must stop over with us till to-morrow morning," she said, "so I can have a chance to return your kindness to me. I want you to be my guests as I have been yours. Will you stop?"

"Of course we will," said Frank. "How could we refuse such a request as that? We owe you a debt of gratitude for the pleasant time we have had since you came on board the ship."

"And I owe you all a debt which I can never repay," she replied. "But I shall never cease to think of and pray for your health and happiness as long as I live."

"And we shall never forget Maria Sanchez," said Frank. "She has been the light of the ship as we sailed through the air."

"Oh, now you can see the old farm-house!" she cried, as the house came distinctly into view.

"Ah! How home-like it looks," said Sallinger, as he gazed at the farm-houses on the place. "No wonder you love it, senorita."

"I do love it with all my heart," she said. "Do you see the yard in front of the house?"

"Yes."

"Well, can you land the ship there?"

"Yes, with ease."

"Then do so. Oh, there's father, mother, sister and my two young brothers! They are looking at us. They don't know what to make of it."

The young inventor began to work the air-ship down to the spot which had been selected by the girl.

The Sanchez family stood in the yard near the front door and gazed in awe-struck wonder at the strange vessel.

They seemed to be rooted to the spot, as they did not move as they gazed up at the air-ship.

But when the ship settled down in the yard, and they saw Maria step forth and run toward them, they all dropped on their knees, as though they regarded our heroes in the light of messengers from the skies.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEETING OF PARENTS AND DAUGHTER—OVER IN MEXICO.

"FATHER! mother!" cried Maria, speeding toward the kneeling group with streaming hair and outstretched hands.

She was recognized at once.

Her mother sprang up and rushed to meet her, crying out joyfully:

"My child! my child! You have come back to us!" and the next moment mother and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

The father and the rest of the family came forward, and a happier group for the next few minutes our heroes had never seen.

It repaid them for all the trouble they had been put to on account of the young girl.

The joyful meeting over, our heroes came in for their share of attention.

The entire family gazed at them and the air-ship as if greatly puzzled what to think of the strange manner in which they had made their appearance.

"Father," said the girl, as she saw her parent staring at her rescuers. "We owe those brave Americans a debt of gratitude."

"Americans!"

"Yes, father. They have an air-ship in which they sail through the air as other vessels sail through the water."

"Ah!"

The superstitious Mexican's eyes were opened at once.

"But where have you been, and why did you leave us, daughter?" he asked, as Frank and his two friends came forward.

The girl promptly introduced them to her parents, and then said:

"The Comanches captured me out in the pecan grove and carried me away so quickly that I had no chance to give the alarm. These gentlemen stopped at the Comanche village and discovered that I was a prisoner. They had a fight with the warriors and rescued me from their clutches, and have brought me back unharmed to you."

That was the whole story in a few words, and the simple-hearted parents needed no more to fill their hearts with a feeling of unbounded gratitude toward the Americans.

The old man's voluble Spanish was poured out in showers of blessings on the heads of the three Americans, whilst the happy mother indulged in another burst of joyful tears.

"Senors," said the father, as he wrung their hands, "stay with us awhile and rest. All that we have is at your service."

"Thanks, Senor Sanchez," said Frank. "We shall accept your hospitality for the night, and then go on our way."

The mother, on hearing that, at once hurried into the house to set it in order for the reception and entertainment of her guests.

Frank saw what she was up to, and turned to Maria:

"Please explain to your mother that we have ample room on shipboard, and that we will sleep there after taking tea with the family."

Maria hastened into the house to inform her mother that it was unnecessary to fix up the spare room. The mother felt relieved when she heard it, and turned her attention toward preparing a supper that would, in a measure, express the depth of her gratitude for the restoration of her daughter to her home.

The supper was even better than our heroes expected. Numerous jars of sweetmeats that the thrifty house-wife had hidden away for many months were brought out and placed on the table, for the first time, to the great delight of the younger branches of the family.

After supper Maria regaled her parents with the story of her adventures, and then devoted herself to the entertainment of her rescuers.

At a late hour our heroes repaired to the air-ship to sleep, and found that Barney and Pomp had arranged everything for their comfort.

They were awakened at daylight by the shrill crowing of two roosters on the place.

There was no more sleeping that morning, and so they arose and prepared themselves to receive the calls from the Sanchez family.

The breakfast was even better than the supper, and our heroes really admired the cooking of Maria and her mother.

After breakfast came the leave-taking.

The daughter and parents were profuse in their expressions of gratitude, and pressed them to stop there on their return from their trip across Mexico.

"I shall never cease to think of you," said Maria Sanchez, as she bade Frank good-bye, "and shall expect to see you again when on your way back to New York."

"If we come within one hundred miles of your home we shall call to see you," said our hero, as he shook her hand and stepped on board the air-ship.

The next moment the rotascope began to revolve, and the air-ship rose rapidly above the tree-tops, whilst the Mexican's family waved them a good-bye.

Up—they went, till they were high enough to get a view of many miles of the great river as it rolled its muddy current toward the gulf.

Laredo was at least twenty miles away to the north of them, and it was from that point they wanted to start the survey.

"We must make Laredo the first place," said Frank, "as we are to start from that point."

"Yes," returned Kensel, "keep up the river. I want to take it in as we go along."

"It is a remarkable river, and a good deal of smuggling is going on all the time on both sides of it."

"What has the government done to prevent it?" Sallinger asked.

"Oh, they have customs officers and a revenue cutter, I believe," replied Frank, "which doesn't amount to much when we take into consideration the great length of border to be watched over."

"Ha! Look there—two men crossing quickly in a canoe!" cried Sallinger, as he saw a canoe shoot out from under a big clump of bushes on the Mexican side of the river.

Frank seized the field-glass, which was lying in its case on the table in the main cabin, and pointed it down at the canoe.

"They are smugglers," he said. "I see several packages in the canoe. I am going to drop down there and have some fun with them."

The air-ship made a rapid descent, and was within one hundred yards of the water when the men in the canoe discovered it. Then they uttered exclamations of surprise and terror.

"Halt there!" cried Frank.

"Who—who are you?" gasped one of the men in the canoe.

"We are American revenue officers," replied Frank.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned both, and the next moment they plunged into the water and left the canoe to float with the current.

"What a couple of fools you are," cried Frank. "We can get you just as easily in the water as in

the canoe. Come aboard here now, or we'll run you down."

But the two smugglers struck out boldly for the American shore, determined to make their escape whilst the air-ship should seek to secure the canoe and its contents.

But they soon saw that Frank was in no hurry about capturing the canoe.

The air-ship could navigate the water as well as the air, and in a few minutes they found themselves overtaken.

"Come aboard, now, like good fellows," said Frank. "It was foolish for you to jump overboard that way."

The two men were taken on board and Sallinger placed over them as a guard.

"Now for the canoe," said Frank, and they set out to secure it.

The current had carried it down about a half mile below, but it was soon overtaken and towed alongside the air-ship.

"What have you got in those packages?" Frank asked of the elder of the two smugglers.

"I don't know, sir. We were hired to carry them across the river."

"Who hired you?"

"A man."

"Wasn't a woman?"

"No, sir. It was a man!"

"Who was he?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't know his name?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you to carry them?"

"Only across the river, sir."

"Who to?"

"A man would be there to pay us the money for our trouble and take the goods. That's all I know about it."

"And you expect me to believe that yarn?"

"It's the truth, sir."

"Oh, come off now," said Frank, laughing good-naturedly. "You ought to know such flimsy yarns as that won't go down with a revenue officer. How long have you been smuggling?"

"Goodness gracious, sir, I am not a smuggler!" exclaimed the man.

"But I know better, my man. Now look here. Give me the straight yarn about this thing and I'll promise not to give you away."

The smugglers looked at each other as much as to say:

"I wonder if we can trust him?"

"You can trust us," said Frank. "We won't give you away. We simply want to get at the ins and outs of this business, and then go to work to break it up."

"We don't know nothing about it," said the man, very doggedly.

"Then we'll carry you both down to Austin and turn you over to the United States authorities, together with the packages found in your possession. If that don't send you up for seven or ten years my experience in the business isn't worth anything."

"What'll you do if we tell you all?" the man asked, in a hesitating sort of way.

"If you tell us a straight yarn, with no slighting of truth, we'll let you go free," answered Frank.

"Done!" exclaimed the man, jumping up and extending his hand toward our hero.

Frank shook hands with him, and said:

"It's a bargain—now give us the yarn."

The man then began his story, and in ten minutes had given away the whole business for fifty miles or more up or down the river. He told just how the contraband goods were smuggled over and secretly carried through the woods to places where they were soon beyond the reach of the customs officers.

"And you've been in the business ten years, you say?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir."

"And never was caught till to-day?"

"No. I don't think that I was ever even suspected," replied the smuggler.

"Well, that doesn't speak well for the government service in this part of the country."

"No; but it will take ten men where they now have one to break up the business."

"I believe you there. But if I were in the service I think I could soon break it up," said Frank.

"Eh? What?" gasped the smuggler. "Ain't you in the service?"

"No; I am simply a private citizen of the United States going to Mexico on business."

The smuggler was nearly choked with astonishment.

"What—did—you—stop us for?" he asked.

"Just to have a little fun with you."

"Well, you've had your fun. Now let us go."

"Oh, you don't seem to be very glad to know that you are out of danger."

"Glad! I am mad, stranger; and if you'll come ashore and gimme a fair chance I'll have some satisfaction out of you."

Frank laughed, and said:

"I am not spoiling for a fight, and if I were I wouldn't waste my time on a man who lives by robbing his country of her just dues."

"You wouldn't talk so sassy if you did not have us in your power," said the smuggler.

"If you get too saucy I'll pitch you overboard and confiscate your goods," returned Frank.

"Who are you?" the smuggler asked.

"My name is Frank Reade, Jr."

"The young inventor?" gasped the other smuggler.

"Yes, the inventor of the air-ship."

"Oh, I have heard of you—you are all right."

"Yes, I am all right," said Frank, "but you fellows are all wrong. You want to get out of this business before you both get into jail. Get into your canoe now and go."

They scrambled into the canoe and rowed off as fast as their oars could carry them.

The air-ship then ascended again, and in a little while the smugglers were out of sight in the bushes on the banks of the river.

"Now for Laredo," said Frank, turning the course of the air-ship northward.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SURVEY OF THE RAILROAD ROUTE BEGINS—BARNEY'S PERIL.

THEY came in sight of Laredo in about a half hour.

It was on the left bank of the river, a small town of rather dingy appearance. Its chief importance lay in the fact that it had a custom house and a few United States officials there.

All along the Mexican border smuggling more or less was going on all the time.

It seemed impossible to prevent it, as men could cross the river in row-boats at night miles above or below the Custom Houses and make their way into the country without much fear of detection.

This was frequently done, and thus Uncle Sam was defrauded out of many thousands of dollars of revenue every year.

On the Mexican side of the river opposite Laredo the country was still more sparsely settled. The face of the country was unbroken for many miles.

A thick growth of chaparral brush covered the earth, through which ran roads but little traveled.

Beyond, in the dim distance, the blue outlines of mountains could be seen.

"The country seems to be level enough for railroad purposes," remarked Kensel to Sallinger, as they were looking at the surface below.

"Yes, I was just going to remark that myself."

"But the mountains will soon be under us."

"Yes. We shall have to pass our instruments then."

They got out their instruments and prepared to make a thorough survey of the country beneath them.

The air-ship hovered over the river near the town for some ten minutes or more, and then moved westward.

Kensel and Sallinger used the instruments which had been provided to enable them to determine the surface of the earth from any elevation.

Mile after mile was passed, after which Sallinger asked that the air-ship be lowered nearer to the earth in order to enable him to get a better view with the naked eye.

It was accordingly lowered to about 1,000 feet above the earth.

"This will do," said Sallinger. "Just the right elevation. I don't care how fast we go now."

Thus they pushed on till sunset brought them to the hilly region.

They had passed quite a number of small, squalid Mexican villages, nearly every house being an adobe hut, not as comfortable inside or out as the old negro cabins down South in slavery days.

The miserable inhabitants turned out in awe-stricken wonder, and gazed up at the air-ship as if they regarded it as something from another world.

"If we had a big tin trumpet," said Frank, "we could make every one of them go down on his knees."

"That would be fun."

"Yes, Pomp once created the wildest excitement ever known at a camp-meeting by blowing a trumpet as we were flying over the camp grounds. The people fell on their faces on the ground and prayed for mercy, thinking Gabriel had blown the final blast."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, grinning from ear to ear at the recollection of the event of years before.

"Where shall we stop to-night?" Kensei inquired, as the sun began to sink behind the distant mountains.

"At the first place where we can have plenty of water," said Frank.

"Is there any game in this part of Mexico?" "Yes, and some very dangerous game, too," was the reply. "You want to be careful how you wander off into the woods. There are huge snakes, cougars, panthers and Mexican lions, all of which are dangerous."

"They won't attack us in camp?"

"No, they keep away from a camp-fire, as do all wild beasts the world over."

"Dar's water down dar!" cried Pomp.

"Where?"

He pointed to a creek which was bounding over a rocky bed between two high hills.

"Just the place," said Frank, "provided we can find an open space large enough for us to make a descent."

The air-ship made several circles over the place, whilst our heroes looked about in vain for a place to land.

At last they had to give it up and start in another direction.

"Hanged if I am not disposed to settle down on the water," said Frank, "and tie up to the bank."

"Well, there's a smooth sheet of water just below the rapids."

"Yes—and I am going down there."

The air-ship descended slowly, and in ten minutes was riding on the clear waters of the creek which formed a smooth basin of something like two hundred feet in circumference.

"Tie her up to the bank, Pomp."

Barney and Pomp caught hold of a limb and began pulling the air-ship in, when a sudden violent shaking of the tree startled them.

The next moment a long, sinuous black serpent swept Barney off the deck and swung him ashore in its deadly coil.

CHAPTER X.

FRANK'S FRIENDS DEMORALIZED BY THE SNAKE.

As may well be supposed, both Barney and Pomp yelled like lunatics as the big serpent seized the former in his coils and swept him from the deck.

Not one of the other three knew what had happened until the yells of the two men called their attention to the terrible situation.

Barney's yell was more of a scream of terror than otherwise; and Pomp's was followed by an exclamation of:

"De Lor' gorramighty!"

But the faithful old Pomp was quick to act in the time of peril. He drew his big camp-knife and sprang right after Barney. The anaconda, for such it proved to be, had his tail lashed around the tree as a vantage ground from which to exert his immense power. His movements were as quick as lightning, and ere Barney could use his hands to protect himself in any way a half-dozen folds of the serpent's body were coiled around him.

But Pomp rushed upon the serpent so quickly that Barney was not immediately crushed. The reptile had something else to do just then. He seized Pomp by the collar—his fangs just grazing the skin.

Quick as a flash Pomp ran his camp-knife through the serpent's neck, and gave a desperate jerk that severed the head from the body and left it clinging to his collar.

Instantly Barney dropped of his own weight, comparatively unharmed, just as Frank rushed up with a hatchet in his hand.

The whole thing was over with in a half minute.

"Dar now!" exclaimed Pomp, "you'se doan' eat no mo' folkses, you'se doan'."

"Ah! you were just in time, Pomp!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw what had been done.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, trying to dislodge the serpent's head from his shoulder. "Dat snake ain't got no mo' head."

Sallinger and Kensei were both pale as death. Such a terrible peril coming upon them so suddenly and unexpectedly had nearly paralyzed them.

But when they saw the serpent writhing in its death agonies, with its trunkless head still clinging to Pomp's shoulder, they sprang ashore.

"My God!" exclaimed Kensei. "I never had such a shock in all my life."

"It was very sudden," said Frank.

"Yes. Are you hurt, Barney?"

"Bedad, an' it's meself as is thyring ter foind out that same," he answered, feeling himself all

over. "Sure, an' if it's dead I am I don't know it."

He was so badly shaken up that he was unable to say whether he was hurt or not.

"Marse Frank," called Pomp, "take dis heah head off me, please."

He had been trying to get rid of the snake's head, but the fangs were so deeply fastened in the coat-collar that he could not do so.

"Yes, old man," said Frank, and he promptly disengaged the snake's head from Pomp's coat-collar. "It was close work for both of you that time."

"Dat's er fac," returned Pomp, as he glared at the still writhing form of the serpent on the ground; "but it war Barney he war atter."

"Yes, he wanted an Irish stew for supper, I suppose."

"Mashed potatoes, rather," suggested Sallinger.

"Yes; an Irish potato."

Barney did not join in the laugh, but kept pulling himself together as if uncertain as to the extent of damages.

"Bedad!" he exclaimed, "it wur the toughest hug I iver had."

They measured the snake, and found that his extreme length was a little over sixteen feet, while the thickest part of his body was as large as a man's thigh.

"If we had time we might take off the skin and preserve it," said Frank.

"It would be a splendid trophy to take back home with us," said Kensei.

"So it would," returned Frank; "but then, if we keep a good lookout, we may secure a still larger specimen."

"If we have to find him as we did this one," said Sallinger, "I would prefer a much smaller specimen."

"So would I," assented Kensei. "The truth is, I don't believe I can sleep well here to-night. Suppose that fellow had a mate, and that mate should find his body here?"

"They generally go in pairs," remarked Frank, very quietly.

"They do, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then why stop here?"

"Because we have no other convenient place to stop at."

"Sail all night," suggested Sallinger.

"Oh, we'd lose the line of the survey," replied Frank.

"Better lose that than a human life."

"But we haven't lost a human life yet!"

"But are you going to wait till you do?" Sallinger asked.

"Oh, no. If any danger threatens us we must meet and overcome it," replied the young hero. "That has been my rule, and I have found it a good one."

"So it is," assented Kensei. "It is the way all the heroes of the world went up to the head of the heap. But what's the use of exposing ourselves unnecessarily?"

"Are we doing so?" Frank asked.

"Why, yes."

"Where is the danger?"

Sallinger looked at him in silence for nearly a minute. Then he replied:

"This serpent may have a mate."

"Yes, and then his mate may have been killed before he was. You have seen no other snake around, and yet you want to run away. I never run from unseen danger."

That silenced the other two.

"When a camp-fire is once built," Frank continued, "all animals, serpents and fowls retire from it. We are in no danger whatever."

"Then I'll stay pretty close to the fire, warm as the weather is," said Sallinger.

"So will I," added Kensei.

"Well, I shall catch some fish for supper," said Frank. "Barney, you had better lie down and take a rest. Pomp, build a good fire, and prepare to get supper."

"Yes, sah," answered Pomp, going to work at once.

In a few minutes Pomp had a rousing camp-fire burning.

In the meantime Frank got out his fishing tackle, and, having secured bait, went on board the air-ship and cast his hook into the water on the other side of it.

In a few moments he got a bite, and caught a large perch.

"Ah! That's a beauty!" exclaimed Kensei.

"Yes," assented Sallinger. "I'll take a hand in that myself."

"So will I," put in Kensei, and both men got tackle and bait and went to work to catch fish enough for supper.

In a little while they caught more fish than a dozen hungry men could eat.

Pomp soon had a pan full of them on the fire,

and when the bread and coffee were ready our heroes declared that they had never eaten a more palatable meal in their lives.

After supper they sat on the deck of the air-ship, smoked their pipes, and talked of adventures in different parts of the world. Frank told of many escapes which had never been recorded in print, in which his listeners were deeply interested.

"I notice that the stars seem much brighter here than further north," remarked Sallinger, looking up at the bright twinklers overhead.

"Yes," said Frank, "and the nearer you get to the equator the brighter they are. On a clear moonlight evening you can sit out-doors and read ordinary print."

"That's pleasant, indeed."

"Yes," said Frank, "but every such luxury has its annoyance. In the tropics the pleasure is marred by all sorts of insects—mosquitoes at night and flies by day. By the way, Pomp, you had better throw that dead snake into the water and cover up the blood as far as you can."

"Yes, sah."

Pomp soon obeyed the order.

"Why did you do that?" Sallinger asked.

"Because the smell of the flesh and blood would attract mosquitoes in larger quantities, and maybe wild animals."

Pomp came back and resumed smoking his pipe, listening to the stories that were old to him.

That night they all slept without anything occurring to disturb their slumbers, and the next morning they were up before the sun, preparing to resume their journey.

CHAPTER XI.

SIGHTING A GUERRILLA BAND.

WHEREVER he found water, Frank indulged in his favorite pastime of fishing.

Inside of ten minutes after he had dressed he was casting his hook for perch in the creek.

The fish bit rapidly, and Pomp prepared them for the pan as fast as they were caught.

"They are the sweetest fish I ever ate," said Sallinger.

"That's because they are just out of the water," replied Frank. "Scale fish begin to deteriorate in flavor and quality within an hour after they are taken from the water. They should be killed and cooked at once."

"I know that to be true from experience," said Kensei.

After breakfast they prepared to rise and proceed with the survey.

Sallinger had his instruments ready, and turning to Frank, said:

"We had better move down this stream a few miles, in order that we may find a gap in these mountains. It would be extremely difficult to cut a railroad through these rocks here."

"Yes," said Kensei. "I was thinking of that last night, just before I dropped to sleep."

Just then Pomp cried out:

"Look up dar!"

They turned and gazed up at the crest of a high precipice on the other side of the creek,

where stood a full grown cougar, the terrible Mexican panther.

His long tail was switching to and fro as if he was anxious to make a meal of the savory odors that came up to him from the remnants of the breakfast of the explorers.

But savory odors might be appetizing, but not satisfying.

"What is it?" Sallinger asked.

"A cougar," said Frank. "Bring me a rifle, Barney."

"Yes, sorr," replied Barney, who promptly brought the weapon from the cabin of the air-ship.

Frank took the weapon and drew a bead on the beast and fired.

The cougar gave a spring into the air and came down one hundred feet or more into the water.

"That was a splendid shot!" exclaimed Kensei.

"Bedad!" said Barney, "the fall wud kilt him dead intirely."

"Dat's er fac," Barney, put in Pomp.

"But the bullet brought him down," said Sallinger.

"Of course," put in Frank. "It would have been enough to kill him without the fall, for the bullet went into his brain, and that is something animals in this world can't stand. I make it a rule when shooting at dangerous animals to aim for the head, if that part is well exposed. If I can't perforate the head I try to send the bullet to the heart."

"How about alligators?" Kensei asked.

"I try to get at their brain through an eye; if not, I let 'em have it behind the foreleg."

"It takes a good shot to send a bullet through an alligator's eye."

"Yes, and every man ought to pride himself on being a good shot."

"I am going to try to be one," remarked Sallinger. "I was considered one in the army."

The dead cougar was soon carried out of sight in the current, and all interest in him ceased.

"Let's get off now," said Frank, touching the rotoscope knob.

The rotoscope began to revolve at a rapid rate, and in a little while the air-ship rose up out of the water.

Up, up it rose, and when about a thousand yards above the earth they moved off down the stream.

"It's a pretty rough country through here for a railroad," remarked Kensel.

"Yes," said Frank, "but the railroads will be built in time. Mexico is the natural inheritance of the American people, and wherever they rule railroads will run."

"You are right there," said Sallinger. "I believe in the destiny of the great republic. We shall absorb both Canada and Mexico in the course of time."

"Yes, and I don't think we shall ever stop there. But look over there. There's the gap you are looking for. Your railroad can run through there, I think."

Sallinger took his glass and looked over the gap in the mountains, whilst Kensel used the instruments which enabled him to ascertain the rise and depressions of the earth's surface below.

"Why, there's an old dirt road running up through there!" exclaimed Sallinger.

"That shows that a railroad could be built there, then."

"Yes, and it runs due west, too."

"It runs toward some of the old mines, I guess," said Frank.

"Ah! I didn't know they were in this part of the country."

"They are all over Mexico. It is the richest country in minerals in the whole world. Her people are too lazy to develop the wonderful resources of the country."

They followed the road as it wound around the base of the mountain-spurs, noting every curve and turn.

In one place they saw a party of Mexicans on horseback.

"That must be a military company," said Sallinger, "as every man of them carries a gun."

Frank took the glass and looked down at the men.

He had seen such bodies of men in Mexico before and knew what they were at a glance.

"It's a band of guerrillas," he said. "The rascals are always fighting among themselves."

"They have no uniforms on," said Kensel.

"Because they have none. They have no principle but plunder, though their leader may have some ambitious object in exciting revolution among the people."

"They haven't seen us yet."

"No, but when they do they will be frightened almost out of their boots."

In a little while one of the Mexicans looked up and caught sight of the air-ship.

He set up a yell of dismay.

The entire band stopped and gazed up at the wonder in the air.

Such a sight appalled them.

They could not account for it, for none of them had ever heard of Frank Reade, Jr., or his wonderful inventions.

They were ignorant and superstitious, and very readily attributed the air-ship to supernatural causes.

"What shall we do?" Kensel asked.

"Nothing," said Frank. "If they let us alone, we ought to follow their example."

"I think so, too," put in Sallinger.

The air-ship pursued its way westward till the road led into a small mountain settlement which seemed to be a mining town.

"We ought to stop here and see what the people think of the guerrillas who are marching on them."

"I think so, too, Mr. Reade," said Kensel.

The air-ship descended toward the plaza in the center of the village.

When about a thousand feet above the earth, some of the villagers caught sight of it and set up a terrible howling.

Men, women and children ran out into the streets frightened out of their wits. Some of them prostrated themselves on the ground and called upon all the saints in the calendar to protect them.

The women crossed themselves, but gazed at the four white men who stepped out of the air-ship the moment it touched the earth.

"Where is the Alcalde?" Frank asked, in loud voice and in good Spanish.

Every man who had prostrated himself sprang to his feet and gazed at the young inventor.

"I want to see the Alcalde," said Frank. "Send him to me at once. Your homes are in danger."

Two men took to their heels and ran down one of the narrow streets of the village as fast as they could go.

"They are going after him, I guess," said Sallinger.

"Yes, he will be here in a few minutes," said Frank. "We will wait for him."

While they were waiting for the Alcalde, the women and children gradually came nearer to the air-ship.

They saw that they were men of flesh and blood like other people, and hence their fears gradually wore away.

One of the young girls, about sixteen years old, tall and graceful, and as beautiful as an houri, attracted the attention of Kensel, who was a bachelor.

"Just look at that girl," he said to Sallinger. "Did you ever see a more beautiful girl anywhere?"

"She is indeed beautiful," replied Sallinger, gazing at the girl.

"I'll give her a ring as a tribute to her beauty," said Kensel, taking a plain gold ring from the little finger of his left hand.

He approached the young maiden, who seemed inclined to run away with the rest of her companions. But a motion from him caused her to stop. He took her hand in his, placed the ring on her finger, kissed her hand, and then returned to the air-ship.

The young girl stood rooted to the spot, her color coming and going under the tremendous excitement the simple tribute had raised in her heart.

No sooner had Kensel returned to the air-ship than the young girl was immediately surrounded by all her young companions, who eagerly examined the solid gold ring on her finger.

"You have made every girl in the town her enemy," said Sallinger, "for they will never forgive her for being beautiful."

"I am afraid I have," said Kensel, "but I did not mean to do that."

"Here comes the Alcalde," said Frank, as he saw an old dignified Mexican approach, followed by a number of others.

The Alcalde came forward, and bowed himself almost to the earth.

"You are the Alcalde?" Frank asked, in good Spanish.

"Si, senor."

"Well, I am traveling through your country in my air-ship. This morning we saw a band of guerrillas marching on your town, and I thought it my duty to stop and tell you about it. They are about fifteen miles away."

The Alcalde was thoroughly demoralized.

He knew but too well what the visit of the guerrillas meant. It meant a forced contribution from all the people in the town who had any money.

As he was one of the wealthiest men in the town, he knew he would be ruined, and that was the cause of his consternation.

"I am a thousand times indebted to you, senor," said the Alcalde, "but I don't know how we are to be protected from them. We have no soldiers here, and but few of our people have any arms."

"Do you know who this guerrilla chief is?" Frank asked.

"Yes, senor. He is nothing more than a robber, though he pretends to be the friend of the people."

"Do you wish us to aid you in driving him back?"

"In God's name we should thank you, senor, but what can so few do? Gomez has more than one hundred rifles."

"Oh, we can send him back very easily if you wish us to do so."

"Then do so, and we shall call down the blessings of all the saints on your head."

"I will do so. Tell your people not to be alarmed."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALCALDE—FRANK AND THE GUERRILLA CHIEF.

THE Alcalde turned to his people and told them what the stranger had told him about Gomez, the guerrilla, and said:

"The Americanos will drive them back. They can sail through the air and keep out of reach of danger and kill off Gomez's men with the greatest ease."

The people understood at once that our heroes were Americanos, and so they crowded around them and asked a thousand questions.

Barney and Pomp could not speak Spanish, but they smiled and talked as if they cared nothing at all for the Spanish language.

The Alcalde was invited on board, where a bottle of wine was opened.

The old dignitary astonished our heroes by his tremendous capacity to store wine under his vest. He got away with an entire bottle in ten minutes, and then intimated that he was dry.

"He's a sand bank," remarked Sallinger in English, which the Mexican could not understand.

"Yes," said Kensel, "and the driest one I ever saw."

"He'll create a famine in the wine-chest if Reade doesn't mix the drinks on him."

"I'll give him the hint if the old duffer calls for a third bottle."

But he did not call for it.

The second bottle got away with him, and at the end of an hour he was as drunk as a lord.

But Frank didn't care anything for that. The old fellow sat in his chair at the table and drank glass after glass as if he believed that he was doing honor to the strangers.

In the meantime, Kensel had managed to speak a few words of Spanish to the fair maiden to whom he had given the ring.

"You are the most beautiful maiden in Mexico, which is the land of beautiful women," he said.

"I have seen no face like yours in Mexico. Shall I hope that whenever you look upon that ring that you will think of the stranger who surrendered the moment he beheld you?"

"Si, senor," was the half-frightened reply.

"Thanks, senorita. I shall never forget the lovely maid of Mexico," and he again kissed her hand in the presence of more than a hundred women and children.

The Alcalde had pressed our hero to stop over till the next day, and promised to give a ball in his honor if he would do so.

Anxious to cultivate the good will of the Mexicans, he accepted the invitation.

Instantly the news spread among the young men and maidens that a ball would be given that evening in honor of the Americanos.

In a few minutes the young people began to slip away to their homes to prepare for the ball.

The air-ship was surrounded all day by the men.

The women were more intent on preparing to look splendid in their finery than in gazing upon the greatest wonder of the age.

Late in the afternoon a Mexican came into the town, having ridden a mustang nearly to death, to bring the news that Gomez, the guerrilla chieftain, was within three miles of the place.

That created the most intense excitement among the population.

"Never mind about him," said Frank. "We will take care of him."

In a little while he called some of the men of the town to take the Alcalde home, which they did.

They then came back to watch the movements of the air-ship.

Frank soon sent it up, and when about a thousand feet above the earth he could see the dust raised by the guerrillas in their mad gallop toward the little town.

"There they are over there," he said. "Get the rifles ready, Barney."

"Yis, sorr," and the brave son of Erin soon had the rifles ready for action.

Then the air-ship sailed off toward the guerrillas, and met them at a point about two miles out.

Of course the band stopped to look at the strange thing sailing around over their heads at least a quarter of a mile high.

Frank wrote on a piece of paper in pure Spanish:

"If Gomez and his men do not go back and leave the people of this State undisturbed, they will all be killed."

He signed no name to this, but tied it to a bullet and dropped it overboard.

It fell in the road right in front of the band, and the chief ordered one of his men to bring it to him.

When he read the note he looked up at the air-ship in dumfounded amazement.

But he was a determined brute, and would not yield to the commands of any one.

He ordered his band to move forward.

"Take your gun, Barney," said Frank, very coolly, "and shoot down that fellow's horse."

Barney did so, and the horse and the rider rolled in the dust together.

The chief sprang up and ordered his whole band to fire at the air-ship.

They did so, but not a bullet went half as high.

Then the chief mounted another horse, but Barney brought him down the same way.

The chief seized his rifle and took aim up at the air-ship and fired. Of course he could not reach so high, and in return Frank dropped another note tied to a bullet, which said:

"If the fool Gomez wishes to stop a bullet he

can do so. If he does not retreat and disband, he will be shot as a traitor to Mexico."

The guerrilla chief was a hot-tempered fellow, and, for a time, was bent on defying the unknown enemy in the air.

But his hand had seen that, while they could not reach the enemy, the enemy could reach them. That was something they could not very well stand.

As if by a preconcerted signal, the whole band wheeled and dashed off down the road whence they came, leaving their leader standing on foot in the middle of the highway.

"That leaves him without any command," said Sallinger.

"And serves him right," returned Kensel.

"Yes, but if the old Alcalde could get hold of him he would order him to be shot," said Frank. "I believe I will drop down there and have a talk with him. Maybe I can give him a scare that will make a good citizen of him."

The air-ship circled around and settled in the middle of the road not very far from where the chief stood, revolver in hand.

"Who are you?" Gomez demanded, the moment the air-ship touched the ground.

"I am the guardian of Mexico," replied Frank, looking the desperado full in the face.

Gomez was terribly shocked.

He didn't know what to make of the strangers, though their dress was such as he had seen before.

"If you again raise your hand in violence against any citizen of Mexico you will die the death of a dog," said Frank, in very stern tones. "You had better begin at once trying to learn how to be a good citizen."

"Who are you?" Gomez demanded again, in a hoarse voice.

"I am the guardian of Mexico," repeated Frank.

Gomez glared at him in trembling silence for a moment or two, and then turned and dashed down the road as fast as his heels could carry him.

CHAPTER XIII.

KENSEL AND THE MEXICAN MAIDEN—THE JEALOUS LOVER.

As the guerrilla chief fled down the road Barney and Pomp set up a yell that made his hair stand on end.

"Shoot 'im!" cried Barney.

"Hi, dar!" yelled Pomp.

Gomez ran with all his might and main, and in a couple of minutes was out of sight.

"That ends our job," said Frank, laughing, "and nobody hurt. I always try to get along without taking human life."

"I am glad nobody was hurt," said Kensel.

"Yes," said Frank, "and I am sorry we had to kill two horses. One good horse is worth a dozen of those guerrillas."

"We may have to kill some of the rascals yet," remarked Sallinger, "for they are all over Mexico."

"Oh, we can't get through this survey without a little trouble. Mexico has a great many lawless characters within her borders. I've been in this country before."

The air-ship once more ascended and sailed away toward the little town where a ball had been tendered the gallant Americans.

The whole population ran out to welcome them, and when they heard the news of the dispersion of the guerrillas they grew perfectly wild in their demonstrations of joy.

Our heroes were given the freedom of the town, and everybody shook hands with them.

But the women did not show up again till they put in their appearance at the ball. They were too busy arranging their toilets.

And such toilets they were!

Such mingling of colors! Such gay ribbons and fancy dresses! Our heroes had never seen anything like it in all their lives.

They were one hundred years behind the times, and yet they were as happy as their gay Parisian sisters.

The long, low ceilinged room was crowded. The Alcalde was there in all his glory, and with an appetite for all the wine he could get hold of. Being the head man of the town, he did the honors of the occasion.

Frank opened the ball with the Alcalde's wife, a fat, puffy old lady on the shady side of fifty. But she could dance with a vigor that astonished him.

Sallinger led off with another married lady, and Kensel had his beautiful young houri for a partner.

The young girl's name was Inez Garcelon, daughter of a small tradesman of the town. She was the belle of the place, a graceful dancer, and as full of romance as an egg is of meat.

The presentation of the ring that day had turned her head completely, and she refused to dance with the young man who had been courting her for nearly a year previous.

The young Mexican was furious.

She had encouraged him with her smiles at all times up to the coming of the Americans.

Kensel was charmed with her as a specimen of physical beauty, but he found her weak intellectually—a silly, ignorant butterfly. But she was dead in love with him, and took little pains to conceal the fact.

She would not let him leave her side for a moment, though he did not wish to do so, as she was the most beautiful girl in the room, as well as the best dancer.

"I am sorry I cannot live always near such a graceful dancer, senorita," he said to her as he waltzed her around the room.

"Senor, you should not flatter a poor girl that way," she replied, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"It is not flattery, senorita. You captured my heart the moment I saw you."

"Ah! senor, if that is true you will not go away, then, for where one's heart is there will he stay."

"Would you have me stay, senorita?"

"Si, senor."

He pressed her closer to his side and whirled around the room in the giddy mazes of the waltz, whilst her lover scowled at them from a corner of the ball-room.

They danced every set together, and the girl's infatuation increased with every passing moment. She believed that she had met her fate in the gallant American, and that he was ready to cast himself at her feet.

The dance continued all through the night, and along toward daybreak she began to beg him not go away in the air-ship.

"My duty compels me to go," he said, "but we will come back this way at the end of a month."

"No, no, you must not go," she said. "I could not live so long without you."

"We shall return in a month," he repeated, "and then—"

"Oh, how can I bear it, senor?"

"By thinking of me all that time as I shall think and dream of you," he said.

At the end of the dance next the last one he led her out under the trees, and there under the shadows folded her to his heart.

Ere she could return his caresses a man darted upon them from behind a tree and flashed a bright-bladed knife in Kensel's face.

"Caramba!" hissed the man.

Kensel sprang aside and caught the upraised arm just as a piercing scream escaped Inez.

The scream brought scores rushing to the spot, and then the jealous lover was recognized in the person of Kensel's assailant.

The infuriated Mexican tried hard to cut him, but Kensel was at home in a scrimmage. He had lived too long in New York not to know how to take care of himself.

By a dexterous blow he sent the knife flying, and then he began to put in some fine work on the Mexican's anatomy.

Whack! and an eye was frescoed.

Whack! and he went to grass with more stars dancing before his eyes than he had ever dreamed were in the heavens.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Won't some yaller son av a gun stip on me corns?"

"Shut up, Barney," ordered Frank.

"Yis, sorr, but it's hard wurruk, sorr."

When the lover was felled by a stunning blow between the eyes Inez rushed forward to throw herself in Kensel's arms. He caught her, and held her gently, keeping an eye on her lover.

But the Mexican had enough.

He arose, pulled himself together, and walked off with some friends, vowing by all the saints to be avenged on both the faithless Inez and the American.

The whole thing was over with in less than three minutes, and the dancers returned to the hall to have the last round before breaking up.

When the last dance was over the young girl refused to go home with her parents.

She said the air-ship would sail soon after breakfast, and that she would stay with Senor Kensel until the time of departure came.

They could do nothing with her. Kensel was annoyed. He could not get away from her five minutes. Such infatuation astonished him.

At last he accompanied her parents to their home, followed by Barney and Sallinger, in order to protect him in case of attack by her lover and his friends.

When they reached the house the girl would not let Kensel leave her for a moment. She knew he was to sail that morning, and could not make

up her mind to part with him even for one short month.

"Senorita," he said, at the door of her home, "you must permit me to take leave here, for my friends await me."

"Senor Kensel," she said, turning and confronting him, "I know you must go, and that I am very foolish to behave as I do, but I can't help it. You have promised to come back to me within a month. If you do not Inez Garcelon will die. She cannot live without you."

"Fear not, senorita. I shall keep my promise to return in a month from this day."

She threw herself into his arms, and then fainted.

Her father took her in his stalwart arms and bore her to her room.

Kensel then bade her mother good-bye and hastened to leave the place.

"I never saw such infatuation in all my life," he said to himself. "She is beautiful in form and face, but after all is nothing but a doll. She is ignorant and superstitious in the extreme. Hello, Barney—Sallinger! What are you two doing here?"

Reade suggested that we come along to see that you did not meet with foul play on the way back."

"Oh, that was unnecessary," said Kensel, laughing. "That fellow got enough, I guess."

"Reade knows the Mexicans better than we do," returned Sallinger. "He has been in this country before."

They walked back in the gray light of the dawn, and were flattering themselves that they would have no trouble, when they saw five men coming toward them.

"By the great Scott!" gasped Sallinger, "there's your man with his friends!"

"Be the Powers!" exclaimed Barney, "it's a ruction we'll have."

Kensel glanced at the men, and recognized his foe among them.

"They are five," he said—"five to our three. We have nothing to fear if we don't let 'em get in the first shot."

"That's so," said Sallinger. "Let's draw and be ready for them."

All three then drew their revolvers and walked forward, as if they took no thought of the Mexicans.

The Mexicans saw the revolvers, and stood still, glaring at them as they passed by.

"Look out for shots in the back," whispered Sallinger.

CHAPTER XIV.

KENSEL'S NARROW ESCAPE—THE JOURNEY RESUMED—A BEAUTIFUL LAKE.

SALLINGER'S warning was just in time.

As our heroes wheeled round and confronted the Mexicans the latter were drawing their weapons.

They were caught. Sallinger was a man of nerve when danger threatened.

Quick as a flash he raised his revolver and covered the foremost Mexican, calling out sternly in good Spanish:

"Drop your guns or you are dead men!"

Barney and Kensel covered the other two nearest them.

But the fourth and fifth men, seeing they were not covered, prepared to fire.

Barney was quicker than they.

He changed his aim and fired at the fifth man, breaking his pistol arm.

Crack! Kensel shot the other one in the shoulder, who set up a howl and ran off as fast as his heels could carry him.

That demoralized the others, and in another moment the other four went after him at the top of their speed.

"What a set of arrant cowards they are!" said Kensel, as he turned and resumed his way toward the air-ship.

"What was that firing about?" Frank asked, when they came up.

Sallinger explained it to him.

"That's bad," said Frank. "They will go to the Alcalde and swear out a warrant for your arrest for attempt to murder. The Alcalde, with the hope that we'll pay a big sum to be let go in peace, will have us arrested and brought before him. Come, get aboard. We'll cook and eat our breakfast ten or twenty miles west of here."

They lost no time in getting on board the air-ship, and a few minutes later they were rising above the tree-tops of the village.

It was an early start, the sun being yet an hour behind. But they believed it the best thing for them to do.

"That girl went back on her fellow, did she?" Frank asked of Kensel, when they had left the village several miles behind.

"It seems so. She is a very foolish kind of a girl."

"But very beautiful."

"Yes—the most beautiful I ever saw."

"What promise did you make to get away from her?"

"That we would return in a month."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry for that."

"You need not do so."

"Oh, it's best to come back and then try to get away again without making any promise. Whatever promise we make to people on this route we must keep, for if we do not they may be able to make the building of the railroad very difficult indeed."

"I see your point and think you are right about it. I am afraid that if I get with her again I will have little chance of getting away from her."

Frank and Sallinger laughed and joked him considerably on his mash.

After sailing about twenty miles they found a lovely place to camp and cook breakfast. It was on the banks of a small lake, which glistened in the sunlight like an immense mirror.

"Ah! That's the most beautiful sheet of water I think I ever beheld," said Sallinger, as he gazed at the beautiful panorama below.

"I am sure I never saw anything like it in Europe or America," said Kensel.

"And yet there is not a house within miles of it," remarked Frank, "which shows that these Mexicans do not appreciate the beauties or resources of their country. The natural resources of Mexico are such as would make her the richest country on the globe if they were properly developed."

The air-ship settled down on the sandy beach of the lake, and Pomp was the first to spring out and make for the water.

"Why, dis heah water am clear as glass," he said. "It am full ob fish."

Barney and Pomp proceeded to make a fire, whilst the others prepared the tackle for fishing. By the time the fire was hot Frank and the others had fish enough for breakfast.

Pomp fried them, and made some bread and coffee.

"The water is very cold," said Sallinger, as he placed his hand in the water.

"Yes," replied Frank. "I think it is fed by springs at the bottom, as I can see no inlet or outlet to it."

"We must go round it and see what we can find out about it," suggested Kensel. "It is a beautiful sheet of water, and may ultimately become a famous resort when the railroad opens up this country to the outside world."

They ate a hearty breakfast and then prepared to make the circuit of the lake in quest of information in regard to it.

The lake seemed to be about eight miles long by three or four in width. The water was clear as crystal, very cold, and teemed with fish.

"There's no outlet to it," said Frank, after sailing around the lake; "at least none that I can see."

"Yet the water is fresh as that of any spring," remarked Sallinger.

"So it is. That demonstrates the presence of springs at the bottom and an outlet through subterranean channels."

"Undoubtedly. I wish I knew the name of the lake."

"Can't you find it on the map?"

"No; I've been looking for it. I am going to put it down on the survey map as Lake Reade."

"That's a good idea," said Kensel. "I hope you will put it down that way."

"Don't do anything of the kind," said Frank. "It may have a name that is known throughout all Mexico, and in that case we should be laughed at."

"I never thought of that," said Kensel. "It may have a name, as it is only twenty miles from the last town we passed. But it's very strange that no settlement of any kind does not exist on its shores."

"Yes. There must be some mystery about it, and I would like to solve it some day."

"So would I," remarked Sallinger. "I find that a railroad could be built to this point. Beyond the lake the mountains seem to forbid anything of that kind."

"We shall have to look for passes," said Frank, looking at the mountains on the other side of the lake.

"Yes, and I guess we will have to look around a good deal before we find one," said Kensel.

"That remains to be seen. We'll make this lake a starting point and make straight for yonder mountain. I am inclined to think that we can find a pass on the north side of it, as I notice a depression on that side."

Turning and going up toward the northern end of the lake, they made that point in about a half hour. Then they made direct for the depression, miles away, which could be seen plainly to the north of the bold mountain spur.

The depression proved to be a gradual incline leading up between two immense spurs, and our heroes followed it for miles.

It was densely wooded, and presented some beautiful scenery, which was greatly admired.

"By my soul!" exclaimed Sallinger. "I believe nature made this pass expressly for a railroad."

"Why so?" Kensel asked.

"Because no such gap can be found anywhere else in the world in such a mountain range as this."

"Is that so?" Frank asked.

"I am quite sure of it, and we might have hunted for it on foot for ten years without finding it. Its discovery demonstrates the wisdom of using the air-ship for the purpose."

CHAPTER XV.

OUR HEROES ARE ATTACKED BY COUGARS—THE TERRIBLE CYCLONE.

"I AM glad to hear you say that," said Frank. "I was not sure that the air-ship would do all that was expected of it in this work."

"You were not?"

"No. I had my doubts."

"Well, you can make up your mind that it does even more than was expected of it. It surpasses even our most sanguine expectations. We have come over one hundred miles already. On foot we could not have made one-fourth that distance."

"You are right, Sallinger," said Kensel. "We shall make the survey long before the other company makes a good start."

"Yes. We should return by the same route and make sure that we have made no mistakes."

"That is a good idea," said Frank. "I think we should make a thorough job of it. I see a gorge down there. We had better see to that. It may be an obstacle not counted on."

"Can you make a landing down there anywhere?"

"Yes, I think I can; at least I can try, anyway."

The air-ship descended to within two hundred feet of the earth, and our hero looked about for some time before he could find a suitable spot to make a descent.

When he did it was on a bare rock where no trees could grow.

Barney was the first one overboard.

"You want to look out, Barney," said Frank.

"This is a wild spot. You don't know what dangerous animals may be lurking about."

"Bedad, thin," said Barney, "it's a gun I'll be after taking."

Pomp handed him a rifle. Frank Kensel and Sallinger followed him, each carrying a repeating-rifle.

They descended the mountain slope, leaving Pomp in charge of the air-ship, and went some two hundred yards toward a deep gorge which Frank had seen in that direction.

Suddenly they were startled by a fierce growl, and the next moment a large cougar came bounding toward them from a thicket in front.

"Look out!" cried Frank, raising his rifle and firing very quickly.

Scarcely had the smoke cleared away when another came out of the thicket with a growl that meant mischief.

The first shot had not done the work for the first cougar, but Barney came up with a second one just a moment later, and the terrible beast was laid out.

The second one, however, came near catching Sallinger on a spring.

The engineer sprang nimbly aside and gave the beast a shot that sent a bullet clear through his body.

Still that did not settle him.

He made another spring, and while his body was yet in the air both Barney and Frank sent bullets into him.

Kensel gave him one in the ear as he struck the ground again, and that laid him out within ten feet of his mate.

"They are dangerous beasts," said the young inventor, as he gazed at the two dead animals.

"I should say they were," said Sallinger, "when two of them attack four men without any provocation."

"I think they had a den close by here somewhere. The female cougar is very fierce when they have cubs in tow."

"I had no idea that they were so fierce," said Kensel. "These two were like Bengal tigers."

"Yes, and as dangerous," replied Frank. "I never like to take any chances with them. You can rest assured that there are no other wild

beasts around here. Those two run this locality to suit themselves, and no other would dare interfere with them."

"Well, I am glad to hear that. We can go on and look at the gorge now."

"Yes—come on. We are all right now."

They followed Frank across the gap to the right, and found a deep gorge not one hundred feet wide, but several hundred deep.

They could hear the roaring of water dashing over rocks in the bed of the gorge.

"This is wonderful," said Frank, as he gazed down into the yawning abyss.

"Yes, and I am glad to see that it does not cross the gap, or pass, we have been following," said Sallinger.

"I was thinking of that," remarked Frank. "I see that it follows the pass through."

"Yes, on the right over there. It cuts clear under that spur over there. It may be 1,000 feet deep in some places. When the mountain rains rush down into the gorge the roar of the torrent must shake the very mountains themselves."

The gorge presented a view such as none of them had ever seen before. The scenery was wild and picturesque in the extreme.

Suddenly they were startled by a clap of thunder, which reverberated through the mountains for several seconds.

Frank looked around in dumfounded amazement, thinking he had struck the enchanted mountains of Rip Van Winkle.

But when he saw a black cloud coming up from the southeast he readily understood the origin of the clap of thunder.

"Come," he said, "we must get back to the air-ship as soon as possible. We've no time to lose."

"Is it a storm coming?" Sallinger asked.

"Yes," was the sententious reply, as the young inventor made haste up the mountain.

They hurried past the spot where the dead cougars lay, and took no notice of them.

When they reached the air-ship they were almost out of breath; and yet Frank did not lose a moment in consulting the barometer. He saw that it was falling rapidly—a sure sign that a storm was brewing—a regular cyclone, in fact.

"Up with her, Pomp!" he ordered.

"Yes, sah!" replied Pomp, starting the rotascope at once.

"Good Lord!" gasped Kensel. "Going up in this storm, Mr. Reade?"

"No, I am going up before the storm gets here."

"We are safer here!"

"If you think so you can get out and stay here."

That did not suit Kensel.

He would have preferred that all remain where they were, but not by himself.

"Why not stay where we are?" he asked.

"Because the wind would tear the air-ship to pieces on this rock."

The air-ship began to ascend.

Frank touched the knob and sent it up still faster.

In the southeast the black cloud was boiling like an immense caldron and growing larger every moment. Forked tongues of lightning darted out of the black mass every minute or two, accompanied by thunder claps that seemed to shake the mountains.

"Mr. Reade," said Sallinger, his face as white as a sheet, "I beg of you not to go up while such a storm is coming on."

"I know my business, Mr. Sallinger. It is far more dangerous on that mountain down there than up on the crest of that black cloud."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, who had been listening to all that was said. He had been there before, and yet he would have preferred to remain on *terra firma*.

"You may be right," said Sallinger, "but I would much rather take my chances down there."

"Wait and see. That is a cyclone, and a bad one at that. It will play the very deuce with things down there."

The air-ship rose higher and higher, until the whole earth seemed to be as flat as a pancake.

They could hear the rolling thunder and see the vivid flashes of lightning in the black cloud. The wind swayed the air-ship to and fro till even Barney turned pale, but the young hero kept on rising higher and still higher.

"My God, Reade!" gasped Kensel, "how much higher are you going?"

"That depends upon the danger," was the quiet reply. "I think another mile will be sufficient."

"Another mile! How high are we now?"

"About two miles, I should say."

Both Sallinger and Kensel groaned.

By and by the dark cloud passed under them and shut out all view of the earth.

"Oh, Lord! Just look! We can't see the earth! We are lost!"

"Look up," said Frank. "Men never rise who never look up. We are above the cyclone in the clear sunshine, while below us the storm is spreading havoc and destruction."

They were amazed.

They could hear the roaring of the storm below, and see the vivid flashes of lightning.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed Sallinger, as he gazed upon the awful scene.

"It seems more like a dream than a reality," said Kensel.

"Truth is stranger than fiction," said Frank. "We are going at the rate of fifty miles an hour."

"My God! We shall be lost!" and both men looked the picture of terror and despair.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAKE ON THE MOUNTAINS.

THE tremendous height to which they had ascended gave both Sallinger and Kensel a shock that broke them all up.

They could not understand that there was no more danger in three than one mile altitude.

Yet they could see that they had ridden above the storm—that the terrible cyclone was exhausting itself on the mountains below, while they were riding above it as peacefully as a summer breeze.

They both went into the cabin to lie down and resign themselves to a fate they could not avert. Two hours later Frank called to them:

"Come out here, Kensel—Sallinger. I want to show you something."

They came out.

"What is it?" Sallinger asked.

"Look down at that picture."

They did look down.

An exclamation of surprise burst from both of them.

The earth lay smiling and fresh and green below them.

Not a breath of wind was stirring, and rain drops glistened in the sunlight on every leaf and twig.

"What do you think now?" Frank asked.

In reply, Sallinger grasped his hand, and said:

"Nothing. I surrender."

"So do I," put in Kensel.

Frank smiled.

So did Pomp and Barney.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

"Sure, an' it's ther thruth," added Barney.

"Where are we now?" Kensel asked.

"About 100 miles out of our way."

"The deuce!"

"Yes. We have got to go back where the storm struck us, and take up the survey where we left off."

"Can we find it?"

"I think so."

The air-ship was then going in a southeasterly direction, the opposite way the storm had blown them.

"We may find it to-morrow," said Frank.

"How green and beautiful everything looks down there!" said Kensel.

"When you see the path of the cyclone you will see the worst destruction you ever saw in your lives," remarked Frank.

"I am glad we did not stay down there on the mountain," said Sallinger.

"So am I," assented Kensel.

"You see, I had been in such storms before," said Frank, "and knew what I was doing."

"But suppose you could not have gotten above the storm, what then?"

"We should have been driven before it at the rate of one hundred miles per hour."

"But could we have ridden through it alive?"

"The chances would have been in our favor, unless we were too near the earth."

"It was a terrible danger, at best."

"Yes, but we are all right at last."

"So we are."

"We are still over the mountains?"

"Yes—Mexico has a good deal of mountain territory."

"There's another lake out there in the mountains."

"Yes—there are several. There's a little one out there. I want to look at them when this survey is ended. They are great curiosities, some of them."

"There's a mountain stream out there running westward."

"Yes, and the water is nearly as cold as ice." By and by they began to look for a place to camp for the night. The sun was sinking in the west and night would soon be with them.

Pomp was the first to find a small lake in the crotch of the mountains, and called attention to it.

"That will do if we can get down there," said Frank. "I don't see any open spot where we can make a landing."

"Drop into the water," suggested Kensel.

"I will if we can't do any better."

They descended to within a few hundred feet of the lake, and found that it was hemmed in by the mountain peaks on every side.

"There is not an open space anywhere on its shores," said Frank.

"No. The lake must be very deep."

"No doubt of it. Shall we drop, then, and stop for the night?"

"Yes."

Ten minutes later the air-ship was riding peacefully on the placid bosom of the lake.

The water was as clear as crystal, and evidently very deep.

Frank looked all round at the mountain, and said:

"No human being, save us, has ever seen this lake before."

"How do you know that?"

"Because we are the first to sail through the air. It cannot be reached any other way."

They gazed at the mountain peaks around the little lake, and came to the same conclusion.

"How large is the lake?"

"I should say it is three miles long by half as wide," remarked Frank.

"That's about the size of it," said Sallinger. "I'd like to get at its depth."

"I'd rather have some of its fish for supper," remarked Kensel.

"So would I," said Frank, laughing. "I'll get the tackle. We'll have to use bacon for bait."

"Well, I guess the fish here would consider bacon a luxury."

The tackle was soon ready, and Kensel was the first to drop a hook in the water.

Barney and Pomp were busy in the kitchen, the latter preparing the stove which had been provided for just such emergencies as this.

"Hello!" cried Kensel, pulling on his line with desperate energy. "I've got a whale!"

He had run out some thirty odd feet of line, and some kind of game fish had taken the hook.

"Take hold here!" he cried. "I can't pull him in!"

Sallinger and Frank ran to his assistance.

The moment they caught hold and began pulling the line parted.

"Ah! he has got away!"

"What a pity!"

"He was a whopper."

"Yes—a fifty or a hundred pounder!"

"Get a bigger hook and stronger line."

"Barney!" called Frank.

"Yis, sorr!"

"Come here."

Barney came.

"Have you a stronger line than this."

Barney looked at the line.

"Yis, sorr."

"Bring it here—and the largest hook you have."

Barney soon produced a line the size of a carpenter's chalk line, and a hook strong enough for a shark.

"I guess that will do," said Frank.

They found the line to be sixty feet in length, and took pains to tie one end of it to a ring bolt in the bow of the air-ship.

Then, after baiting it with a half pound chunk of bacon they cast the hook into the water.

The bait went down deep, and hung there several minutes without being molested.

Frank and the others concluded to try for small fish near the shore, and cast their hooks over on that side of the air-ship.

Sallinger soon caught a two-pound trout—then Frank followed with a four-pounder. Kensel then yanked in a three-pounder.

"This is a trout pond, I guess," remarked Sallinger.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, as he came out of the kitchen and looked at the three beauties floundering about on the deck.

Suddenly Frank felt a jerk that came near taking him overboard, and the next moment he was struggling with a big fish at the other end of his line.

After a hard fight he landed a nine-pound trout on the deck.

"That's the finest trout I ever saw," said Sallinger.

They next felt a jerk that jarred the entire ship, and a moment later the air-ship began moving through the water.

"Hello! The whale has taken the big hook!" cried Kensel.

All three rushed to the bow of the air-ship. The line was as stiff as a wire.

A big fish of some kind was pulling at the hook and dragging the air-ship out toward the middle of the lake.

Frank caught hold of it and tried to pull against it.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "Whatever it is it is a big one, and game all through."

"We'll have to let him tire himself out before we can manage him," said Kensel.

"Yes, that's the only way."

The fish pulled the air-ship clear across the lake, and made several efforts to go to the bottom, but the line was too strong for him.

Then he made his way toward the south end of the lake, and pulled the air-ship nearly two miles.

"By George!" exclaimed Kensel, "he is a game fellow!"

"Yes," said Frank, "I never saw anything like it. Ah, there he is! It's a trout—a forty pounder if an ounce!"

The fish had rushed to the surface and almost thrown himself out of the water.

CHAPTER XVII.

POMP GETS A DUCKING.

OUR heroes were greatly excited when they caught a glimpse of the magnificent fish they had hooked.

Frank attempted to pull him in.

But the game was too pugnacious yet, and he had to give it up.

"Bring the rifle, Barney, and give him a bullet when he comes to the surface again."

"Yis, sorr!" and Barney ran into the cabin to get the rifle.

"I wouldn't lose him for his weight in silver," said Frank.

"Nor would I," said Kensel.

Barney came out on deck with the rifle and stood ready to fire when the fish should come to the surface again.

Frank tugged at the line again, and the game made desperate efforts to shake himself loose.

He came to the surface and shook his head like a terrier shaking a rat.

Barney fired, and the bullet went clear through the fish a couple of inches back of the gills.

He rolled over on his side.

His quivering tail and fins showed that he had received his quietus, and Frank began to pull him in.

"That settled him!"

"That laid him out!"

"Look out dar!" cried Pomp.

Frank pulled him up near enough for Barney to catch him with a boat-hook.

They then succeeded in pulling him on board, where he made a few more convulsive flounderings, and then gave up.

"What is it?" Sallinger asked.

Frank looked closely at the fish and said:

"If it isn't a trout I'm out of my reckoning."

"It looks like a trout," said Kensel, "only I never heard of trout attaining such enormous size before."

"Nor I, either," said Frank, "and that's what puzzles me. This fellow will weigh forty or fifty pounds."

"Every pound of fifty," said Kensel.

They baited the hook again and threw it overboard.

"I want a steak off this big one for my supper, Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes, sah."

"So do I."

"Yes—all of us."

Pomp proceeded at once to comply with their request, and in a little while the trout steaks were broiling in the kitchen.

The little lake was as smooth as a sea of glass, and the air-ship floated lazily on its bosom as if it had always rested there.

They were nearly in the center of the lake when they sat down to supper.

The steaks were delicious—cut from the fish within a few minutes after he was taken from the water.

When they were about half through the meal they felt a jerk that told too plainly that another fish had struck the big hook.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, as the air-ship began to out through the water, "another whale has got the pork!"

"Go out and see what it is, Pomp."

Barney was already out there. The fish was pulling the air-ship through the water just as the other one had done.

Pomp caught hold of the line to feel the weight of the fish.

"De Lor' Gorrarnighty, Barney!" he exclaimed, "dat's er whale!"

"It's a whopper!" said Barney.

"Well, ain't er whale a whopper?"

"Bedad, it's er wolze naygur ye are, Pomp. A whale's a whale."

"Ob course it am, an' er Irisher am er fool all de time."

"Sure, it's Irish ye are, Pomp."

"Dat's er fac', Barney. I ain't no ole fool. I'se fresh an' young an'—"

"What kind of a fish is it?" Frank called out to them from the cabin.

"I doan' know, Marse Frank," replied Pomp.

"He is er runnin' away wid deship."

"Well, if he tries to drag us over the mountains let us know."

"Yes, sah. Reckon he ain't dat kind of fish, though," and Pomp turned to take hold of the line again.

To his surprise it was slack.

He sprang to his feet and began pulling it in.

When he had about twenty feet of it in the fish made a plunge, and the line went out again like greased lightning.

Pomp had stepped on a coil of it.

In a moment he was caught round the ankle, and went overboard with a yell that awoke all the echoes of the mountains.

Frank and the others sprang from the table and rushed out on deck.

"What's the matter? What has happened?" Frank demanded.

"Bedad," said Barney, looking over where Pomp had gone down, "the fish has caught him!"

"How did it happen?"

"Niver a wan av me knows. He [tuck the line, an'— Howly Moses!]

Pomp had risen to the surface, nearly fifty yards in the rear, and called out:

"Barney!—Marse Frank!"

The fish was pulling the air-ship away from him at a terrific rate.

"Cut the line, Barney—quick!" commanded Frank.

Barney was quick to obey, and in another moment the line was severed.

Frank then set the propeller in motion, and guided the air-ship round to where Pomp was struggling in the water.

He was lifted on board, his teeth chattering as a dozen chills had struck him at once.

"Golly, but dat am de coldest swim I eber bad!" he exclaimed.

"What did you jump in for?"

"Dat fish done it."

"How?"

"I drawed in de line an' den stepped on it like a fool. Dat er fish jes made er jerk an' tuck me ober quicker'n lightning. Did yer catch 'im?"

"No. We had to cut the line to save you."

"Golly, dat am too bad."

Pomp went inside and changed his wet clothes for dry ones. Then he took a good drink of brandy in a cup of hot coffee to drive out the chill.

Then he felt all right again, and went about his work as though nothing unusual had happened.

He and Barney sat down to supper after the others were through, and when Pomp asked for another piece of fish the humor of the Irishman dropped out.

"Bedad, it's not so frish as the wan in the water."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, as he helped himself to another slice, "an' ef you would take er bath, too, yer would be fresher'n this heah fish."

"Sure av I wait for a fish ter take me in I'd niver take a bath," retorted Barney.

"Ob course yer wouldn't. Yousse nebberw ash yerself."

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, springing to his feet and making a savage blow at Pomp's head.

Pomp sprang up and dodged the blow. He was not as excitable as the Irishman, for he was laughing all the time.

"What in thunder is the matter with you, Barney?" Frank called out from the deck, where he and the others were enjoying their cigars.

"I'll kill the naygur!" yelled Barney, dashing round the table to get at Pomp.

Pomp ran out on deck.

Barney pursued him, aiming furious blows at his head.

Suddenly Pomp made a run at him and butted him in the stomach, knocking him overboard into the water.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BARNEY AND POMP—THE BEAR AND DEER.

"WHAT in blazes is the matter with you two?" yelled Frank.

"Dat Irisher ain't got no sense, Marse Frank," said Pomp, laughing good-naturedly.

"Ugh—ough!" exclaimed Barney, as he came to the surface and began swimming.

"Hi, dar, Barney—bring up er fish wid you!" cried Pomp.

"Shut up!" said Frank, who was getting quite angry over what had occurred.

Barney was pulled on board, and the moment he regained his footing he struck Pomp a terrible blow on the ear.

Barney tried to get away, but Pomp was too quick for him.

The woolly head again caught him, and again he went overboard into the water.

"Served him right," said Frank. "Let him drown. Such fools ought to get the foolishness bitted out of them."

Sallinger and Kensel pulled him back on board again, and Pomp went inside at Frank's command.

"If you don't behave yourself, Barney," said Frank, "I'll pitch you overboard and make you swim ashore."

Barney needed no lecture.

He had received enough.

Pomp's head and the cold ducking had cooled him off admirably.

He went to his berth and changed his wet clothes for dry ones, and when he came back to the table Pomp gave him a cup of hot coffee with two tablespoonfuls of brandy in it.

"Dat's mighty col' water, ain't it?" Pomp asked, as he gave him the coffee.

"Yis, begorra," and the Irishman laughed in spite of himself.

"Do they often quarrel that way?" Kensel asked of Frank.

"Once or twice on every trip," was the reply, "and Pomp butts him out every time. They are the best friends in the world too."

"Barney is very quick-tempered."

"Yes," said Frank, "Pomp can keep his temper much better than Barney can."

"Strange they never use their weapons on each other."

"They came very near doing so once in Africa. I told them that the one who drew blood from the other with any weapon other than what nature gave them I would shoot as I would a dog. Since that time they have never been inclined to use any weapons."

A half hour later Barney and Pomp were conversing together as if nothing had occurred to disturb the harmony of their relations.

The night was one our heroes never forgot. The air was still and the surface of the lake like a sheet of glass.

Overhead the stars never seemed so numerous or so bright, and every one of them was reflected in the bosom of the lake.

Our heroes sat up till midnight drinking in the beauty of the scene.

Then they retired.

When they awoke the next morning they found that Barney and Pomp had caught a mess of pan-fish for breakfast.

"Hello! There's a deer drinking water from the lake out there," cried Sallinger.

"Where?" Kensel asked.

"Just under that big tree out there," and Sallinger pointed in the direction of a large tree which stood almost in the water about the eighth of a mile away.

"I see him," said Frank, who came out at that moment with a rifle in his hands.

"Are you going to shoot at him at that distance?" Kensel asked.

"Yes," he replied. "These rifles will kill at three-quarters of a mile if the aim is true."

"How far is it to that deer?"

"About an eighth of a mile, I think."

Frank took a long, deliberate aim and fired.

The deer sprang up and tumbled into the water.

"Whoop," yelled Barney. "Sure an' the Ould Nick is in the gun!"

"That was the finest shot I ever saw," remarked Sallinger.

"Yes," said Kensel. "I never dreamed that you would hit him at that distance."

"These Winchesters are long reaching weapons," said Frank. "Send the ship over there, Barney, and we'll get the hams for a change from fish diet."

Barney set the propeller going, and guided the ship toward the point where they had seen the deer plunge into the water.

When within about one hundred yards of the shore they espied a bear climbing up the face of the bluff.

"Ah, old fellow," said Frank, "I'll give you a tumble," and aiming at the beast he pulled the trigger.

Bruin growled, but kept on climbing up the bluff.

He was evidently making for his den somewhere above.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Frank gave him three shots in rapid succession.

The fourth shot seemed to have broken his back, for he soon lost the use of his hind limbs.

Frank was about to take a more deliberate aim, when the brute lost his grip and came tumbling down the face of the bluff.

"Dar he goes!" cried Pomp.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, as the big brute tumbled down from tree and bowlder, a distance of more than two hundred feet, finally landing in the water not ten paces from where the deer had perished.

"This is a fine place for game," said Kensel, looking around in quest of something else to shoot at.

"It would seem so—a deer and bear before breakfast. Run up alongside there and get a ham each from them," said Frank.

Barney ran the air-ship alongside the deer and Pomp soon cut off a ham. Then the bear gave up one of his hams, after which Pomp proceeded to cook some venison steaks for breakfast.

After breakfast Frank prepared to rise and sail over the mountains in quest of the survey trail which the great storm had driven them from.

The rotoscope was set going, and in a few minutes the air-ship left the water and began to ascend.

Up, up it went, and soon the top of the highest peak was below them.

"Look at dem eagles," cried Pomp.

From the west they saw a dozen immense eagles making straight for the air-ship.

CHAPTER XIX.

POMP'S PHILOSOPHY AND SALLINGER'S THEORY—THE TRACK OF THE CYCLONE.

"THE eagles are coming for us," cried Frank, as he saw the great birds making a straight shoot for the air-ship. "Get out the shot-guns."

Barney and Pomp lost no time in getting out the shot-guns.

"Why, will they attack us?" Sallinger asked in wondering surprise.

"Of course they will. They are the masters of space, and won't allow any invasion of their domain. We have a fight with them every time we meet them."

"Well, I guess we can take care of ourselves, even if we haven't any wings or talons."

"Yes, but you want to look out that they don't grab you with their talons, for they are very dangerous."

The eagles came shrieking and screaming around the air-ship, not knowing what to make of it.

"Give it to 'em!" cried Frank, aiming at an immense eagle who was sailing close to the rotoscope, as if half inclined to attack it.

It was but a moment that he aimed, and then he pulled the trigger.

The eagle gave a shrill scream and then went tumbling toward the earth.

Two others darted to his assistance, screaming at a terrible rate.

Crack, crack!

Barney and Pomp sent two more of them down, and then Sallinger and Kensel let loose the dogs of war.

Kensel shot at one not ten feet away, and killed him instantly.

Sallinger killed his also, and still the others showed fight.

Kensel wounded another, and he flew away; then the remaining ones made a determined attack on the rotoscope, which was making three hundred revolutions per minute.

One of them reached out his foot to clutch it with his great claws.

The next moment his legs were nearly jerked off of him, and he went away, shrilly screaming, as fast as his wings could take him.

Two or three more shots broke them all up, and the survivors took flight and sailed away for the mountain peaks on the south side of the lake.

"Well, I've read of the battle above the clouds at Lookout Mountain," said Sallinger, as he gazed after the eagles, "but I never thought I would ever sail up and fight eagles in their own element."

"You will do worse than that before you get back home," said Frank, laughing.

"What will it be?"

"Just wait till the time comes, and you will agree with me. I am glad none of us got hurt."

"Did you ever get hurt by one of them?"

"Ask Pomp," replied Frank.

"Dem eagles is worse nor bull-dogs, sah," said Pomp. "Dey grab a nigger quicker'n a wink," and he told of some of his battles in the air with eagles.

"I didn't know they would attack human beings that way," remarked Sallinger.

"Dey will go fo' a elephant ef he flies up whar dey is, sah," said Pomp.

"The moral is, then—stay where you belong."

"Yes, sah, an' dat's er fac'," assented Pomp.

"I don't believe in dis heah flyin' nohow."

"Why not?"

"Kase er nigger ain't got no wings. He ain't no bird, sah."

"But he is to have wings some day, you know, when he crosses over Jordan."

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac', but Jordan am a hard road ter trabbel afo' he gits dem wings."

"But if he makes a flying machine before he crosses Jordan, and gets used to flying about, he won't be such a green hand when he gets over on the other side, you know."

Pomp shook his head.

He could not subscribe to that kind of philosophy. Somehow it didn't fit in with his theology.

"When a nigger gets too smart," he said, "he makes er fool ob hisself, and comes outen de little en' ob de horn. Niggers ain't got no bizness er flyin' 'bout when dey ain't got no wings."

"White men have no wings either," remarked Sallinger.

"Dat's er fac', sah, an' some white folks want ter fly all ober de worl'."

"You have flown all round the world yourself, have you not?"

"Yes, sah, an' dat's er fac'. But Marse Frank made me done dat. Dis chile ain't got no wings yit, nudder."

"Well, I don't think you ought to be down on flying machines, Pomp, any more than on railroads. Because a man can't run forty miles an hour that should not hinder him from going that fast on the cars."

"No, sah, but de kyars stay mighty close to de ground all de time."

Sallinger laughed and saw that he had failed to convince the old dandy by his logic.

It was about noon when Frank discovered the lake near the mountains where the cyclone overtook them. He was glad to get at the starting point again, and said to Kensel:

"We can now resume the survey from that mountain over there."

"Is that the place where we left off?"

"Yes."

"How can you know?"

"By yonder little lake several miles beyond. Don't you recognize the incline between those mountain peaks?"

"Yes, I believe I do now."

"Well, that's where we were when the cyclone came up. You will have a chance to see how destructive it was."

It was difficult to see the full extent of the damage committed by the storm. But when the air-ship got down to within a few hundred feet of the path of the storm the evidence of its awful destructiveness was plainly to be seen.

Trees were torn up by the roots, and limbs scattered about in every direction. A wide swath had been cut through the forest, showing that no human being could have lived through it.

"I never saw anything like it," said Kensel.

"Nor I," put in Sallinger.

"I have seen much worse," said Frank, "and in this very country. It is worse in this climate than north of the Rio Grande, though they have some terrible ones in Texas sometimes. Have you caught on to the survey where you left off yesterday?"

"Yes, I believe I have," said Sallinger, consulting his instruments.

"Then we turn westward again and see how the road can be made to crawl over those mountains," and the air-ship veered around and made a westerly course again.

"Go slow, as the mountain is rough in some parts, and I have to make calculations as we go along."

"Very well. Five miles an hour is the speed now."

They made a few miles, and then the pass through the mountains turned southward.

"We shall have to follow that," said Sallinger, "till we can find our way out of it."

"It spreads out into a sort of plateau," remarked Kensel.

"Yes," said Frank, "and right here, several thousand feet above sea level, is the finest climate in the world. They have neither summer or winter here—it is always a May day season."

"It must indeed be a fine climate."

"Yes. I regard the table lands of Mexico as having the finest climate in the year."

"Ah! There's a hacienda out there!"

"Yes," said Frank, "and if you will look farther ahead you will see a village and haciendas all around it."

Kensel seized the field glass and took in the valley for many miles around.

"Yes," he said, "it is one of the most beautiful valleys I ever saw."

"It would pay to run the road through the entire length of the valley," remarked Sallinger.

"Of course it would, and when a few thousand live Yankees settled here it would become one of the famous winter resorts of the world. Do you know, I think some of the old silver

mines which the Spaniards worked 200 years ago are in these mountains?"

"I would like to see some of them."

"I saw one of them in Peru once," said Frank.

"It had not been worked in over a hundred years, and was in a neglected condition, of course. But one could see enough to form an idea of the very loose way the Spaniards worked them."

"Shall we stop at that village?" Kensel asked, as the village came more plainly in view.

"I think we had better stop a little while—long enough to get at the name of the place," and the party thought so too.

As the air-ship neared the village the entire population ran out into the streets in the wildest excitement over the appearance of the flying visitor.

CHAPTER XX.

A TOWN IN THE MOUNTAINS—THE PADRE AND ALCALDE.

SHUT OUT from all the world in that little vale in the mountains, where railroads, telegraphs and newspapers were unknown, it is not to be wondered at that the inhabitants of the town of Coxatla had never heard of Frank Reade, Jr., and his famous inventions.

When they beheld the air-ship hovering in the air above their quiet little town they believed that some heavenly visitor was coming to give them the blessing of a celestial presence.

They ran out into the streets of the town and gazed up with faces that told of alternating hopes and fears.

The priests, who possess more influence in Mexico than anywhere else in the world, looked up, as much mystified as any of their people, and crossed themselves every minute for half an hour.

The air-ship settled slowly down and landed in the center of the main plaza. The people fled in every direction, and then, when at a safe distance, turned to gaze at their strange visitors.

"They seem to be pretty well frightened," remarked Sallinger.

"Yes," said Kensel, "worse than at any place we have struck yet."

"They are almost out of the world here," said Frank, "and have had no chance to keep posted with more favored localities."

Frank sprang out of the air-ship, followed by Sallinger and Kensel.

Barney and Pomp remained in charge of the air-ship.

Frank approached a group of men at the lower end of the plaza.

But the group dispersed and scattered on their approach.

Frank cried out in Spanish:

"Mexicans, stop! We are friends!"

That had a wonderful effect on them.

A fat, jolly-looking padre, with crown shaved as smooth as a billiard-ball, approached them.

Frank advanced to meet him, extending his hand, saying:

"Father, I am glad to meet you and take you by the hand."

"Who are you?" the padre asked, as he shook the young hero's hand.

"We are Americans traveling to the Pacific over your beautiful country."

"But you came through the air!" said the astonished padre, looking at the air-ship as it rested on the ground in the center of the plaza.

"Yes, that is our air-ship. We travel that way when we have long journeys to make."

The face of the padre was a picture to look at. Amazement was in every feature.

His people, seeing that he was not being harmed, gradually came up and stood behind, gazing in awe-stricken wonder at the strangers.

"I don't understand how you can fly through the air," said the padre.

"You saw us come down through the air, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know that we *did*, even though you can't understand it."

And a smile came over the face of the young inventor as he spoke.

"Yes, even so, señor," replied the padre.

"It is a simple mechanical apparatus which will soon be known to all the world," said Frank.

"We came down to pay our respects to you, father, and the Alcalde."

The padre was flattered; he was a good sort of a fellow, with the usual amount of human weakness with regard to flattery.

"We are glad to welcome you, señors," he said. "I will send for the Alcalde, who will soon be here."

The padre turned and spoke to one of the many gaping rustics behind him, and the youth turned on his heels and quickly disappeared.

"Father, will you be so kind as to have some fresh water brought to us? We are very thirsty."

The padre spoke to those about him, and a dozen women set off at once to fetch water.

In a little while they returned with pails full of clear, sparkling water, almost as cold as ice.

"Ah! How kind your people are, father!" exclaimed Frank, as he took a drink of the water.

"Water belongs to all the people of the earth," said the padre.

"Yes, and it is one of God's best gifts to man," said Frank. "But, father, will you drink a bottle of wine with us?"

"Yes, my son—two, if you wish."

Sallinger winked at Kensel, and Barney and Pomp emptied several pails of the water into the tank.

The Alcalde soon put in an appearance, and as soon as Sallinger saw him he whispered to Kensel:

"We can't get off with less than a half dozen bottles."

And he was right.

Both the padre and the Alcalde were men with extraordinary stomachs and hard heads. They went on board the air-ship to drink a bottle of wine with the new-comers.

The Alcalde proved himself a giant in wine drinking. He got away with two full bottles himself. The padre managed to put himself on the outside of one and a half bottles, whilst one bottle was enough for Frank and his two comrades.

Whilst the drinking was going on on board the air-ship, the whole population of the town stood around and looked at the wondrous vessel which had come through the air like a bird.

Among the hundreds of lookers-on were many beautiful mountain beauties. Kensel was strongly tempted to pay his respects to some of them, but a hint from Frank deterred him.

After several hours delay Frank began to weary of his guests.

They had settled down into that condition of mental somnolence where all the world is forgotten—the natural consequence of a stomach full of generous wine.

The truth is the Alcalde was drunk and the padre was happy, and both were so good-natured that nothing could be said or done to disturb them.

"We are caught in our own trap," remarked Frank to Sallinger in English.

"Yes, it looks that way, but what are we to do about it?"

"I see no other way than to grin and bear it."

"Why not tumble them out and sail away?" Kensel asked.

"Because if we get the community down on us Americans, as we would be sure to do if we treat the padre and Alcalde that way, you could never make a railroad a success in this part of the country."

"Ah! I never thought of that. It won't do to offend them."

"Of course not; we have plenty of time, and can spend the night here if necessary."

"Yes, I suppose we can. They have such fine water here that I wouldn't mind stopping over night."

"The only trouble is we won't have any wine left if we do," remarked Kensel. "Those are the worst two old guzzlers I ever saw."

"I've seen much worse," said Frank, "but I confess that I wanted to murder them."

"Not a doubt of it," and Kensel laughed.

"Why not send out and buy some native wine," suggested Sallinger, "and fill up the empty bottles with it? I guess it's cheap here."

"Hanged if I don't act on that suggestion," said Frank. "I have a lot of Mexican silver dollars, and I guess I can get one of those fellows out there to get the wine for me."

"Try it, anyhow."

Sallinger and Kensel entertained the Alcalde and the padre while Frank negotiated with one of the Mexicans to purchase five gallons of good native wine for the ship.

The man took the money and ran off with it. In twenty minutes he returned, accompanied by a wine-merchant, who delivered some real good wine for the money that had been sent him.

"By George!" exclaimed Kensel, on tasting the wine, "it's good enough to take along with us."

"It is cheap enough to fill up guzzlers with, too," said Frank, and he ordered Pomp to refill the empty bottles with the new wine.

By and by the padre woke up and looked around for a bottle with something in it. Pomp brought in one of the refilled bottles and placed it on the table in front of him.

He poured out a glassful of it and drank it with great gusto.

Frank and the others watched him to see if he had discovered the trick. To their surprise, he

took a second glass and swallowed it, as if it were nothing more than so much water.

Then the Alcalde followed his example, in that he took two glasses brimming full.

[The air-ship remained in the plaza, and the men, women and children surged around it till near midnight. During all that time the Alcalde and the padre still sat at the table drinking wine and dozing.

Pomp prepared a supper, but the two guests were too full to partake of it. At last the Alcalde's son came for him, and, with the aid of several others, both he and the jolly padre were taken away.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE WING AGAIN—THE CAMP INVADIED BY BANDITS—THEIR RECEPTION.

WHEN the guests were gone our heroes arranged for watches during the night, and then retired to get some sleep.

They had been bored almost beyond endurance by the Alcalde and the padre, and needed all the sleep they could get.

"Have breakfast at sunrise, Pomp," said Frank, just before he rolled in for the night.

"Yes," said Pomp.

All of them were called to breakfast promptly the next morning, just as the sun was gilding the highest mountain peaks east of the town.

They sat down to venison steaks, eggs and coffee.

"Where did you get the eggs, Pomp?" Frank asked.

"Bought 'em, sah."

"Where?"

"Hyer, sah."

"Why, how did you manage it? You can't speak Spanish?"

"Dat's er fac', sah, but de gal brung 'em hyer, an' I gib her a quarter for 'em."

"How many dozen did you get?"

"Two dozen, sah."

"Well, that's cheap enough. If you had spoken Spanish you would have paid double for them." Pomp grinned.

"Dei don't cheat dis chile if he doan no Spanish."

"You are right, Pomp," said Sallinger. "I'll bet you 'mashed' her."

"No, sah. I ain't no 'masher'."

Just as they finished breakfast, and were preparing to enjoy a smoke, Frank saw the padre and about a score of men coming toward them.

"There he comes again!" he exclaimed. "Up with her, Barney, or we'll have him with us all day."

Barney rushed to the rotascope knob, and set the electric battery in motion.

The rotascope began to revolve, and in another minute the air-ship swung clear of the earth.

The padre ran forward, and yelled at the top of his voice. The men with him lifted up their voices and yelled in unison.

"Too late, my hearties," said Frank, laughing. "You are pretty early, but you didn't quite catch us this time."

"What in thunder are they after at such an early hour as this, I wonder?" Kensel asked.

"Hanged if I know, but we would have been compelled to treat that crowd, and that would have held us there till all the town got out again. We made a lucky escape."

"Yes, I think we did."

"Just look how the women are pouring out of their homes. The news has flown all around that we are going away."

The women and children ran out into the yards and streets, and gazed up at the air-ship as it went skyward.

In a little while the air-ship passed in a south-westerly direction. Sallinger was busy at his instruments making a map of the route as they went along, and keeping a record of the elevations and depressions of the earth's surface.

By degrees the little town faded from view and other towns and haciendas came in sight.

"I believe the Mexicans elect the man who can drink the most to be Alcalde," said Sallinger.

"I am sure of that," said Kensel, "though I have seen but two of them."

"They were fair specimens," said Frank.

"Well, you ought to know, having been in Mexico before."

"They are pretty much all alike all over the country. But woe to the foreigner who is brought before one of them charged with even the most trivial violation of law. He is stripped of everything of value—utterly despoiled—and he can find no redress."

"Is there no court of appeal?"

"Yes—but the Alcalde never leaves anything for a higher judge to pluck; hence an appellant can get no hearing there."

"Well, it's a queer country indeed."

"Indeed it is. You want to keep out of the law courts in Mexico. A man's best friend there is his revolver."

"There's a gap in the mountains on the right out there," said Sallinger, who kept his eyes about him all the time he was talking.

"It appears to be a good wide pass," remarked Frank, as he gazed in the direction indicated.

"Yes, I think we had better go over there. It leads off in the right direction."

"Very well," said Frank, and the course of the air-ship was changed accordingly.

To their surprise, they found that the pass was another long valley or strip of table land in the mountains, where the soil was rich and the climate the finest in the world.

"This pass was cut for a railroad when these mountains were built," remarked Kensel, as he surveyed the beautiful landscape from a high altitude.

"It would seem so," returned Frank, as he looked away in the distance. "But I think you will find some pretty rough mountains at the farther end of the pass."

"No doubt of it, but this vale is rich enough to support a road, even though it did not connect with the Pacific. But we'll find a way to get through to the coast. I have no fears on that score."

"There are several villages in sight now," said Sallinger, "and the valley appears to live in profound peace with all the world."

"Yes—ah! There's a big road. Mexico has some great highways that she has the right to be proud of. They all point toward the capital. I guess this one runs down through this gap till it comes out into the great table-lands."

Our heroes did not follow the road but a few miles, as their course compelled them to keep in a westerly direction.

Following the pass, they found that a stream—from a number of springs in the valley—flowed westward.

"Water never runs up hill," said Frank. "We are on the western slope of the mountains. That stream empties into the Pacific somewhere, I am sure."

"Let's follow it awhile and see if it leads us to a good outlet for the railroad."

They followed it all the afternoon, and saw it grow larger every hour by the junction of other streams with it.

Night came on, and our heroes concluded to settle down on the banks of the stream and camp there.

They found fish plentiful, and had no trouble in catching all they wanted for their supper.

Just before they were about to retire to their berths on the air-ship they were startled by the sudden appearance of a dozen armed Mexicans.

Frank readily recognized their character from their dress and manners.

So did Barney and Pomp.

They were regular Mexican bandits.

Frank rose up and confronted them as they surrounded the camp-fire.

"Who are you, senor?" the leader demanded of Frank.

"We are Americans, senor," was the quiet reply of the young inventor.

"Americanos?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Mexicans!" replied the leader, with a swaggering air.

"Oh, you are at home, then?"

"Yes; at home anywhere in Mexico. What are you doing here?"

"Camping for the night. We are traveling over the mountains to the coast."

The leader glanced around as if in quest of the horses he supposed our heroes had ridden. But seeing none, he asked:

"How do you travel?"

"Through the air."

The leader looked Frank in the face a full minute or so, as if he did not understand him.

"We are traveling through the air," he said.

"We can't travel much any other way. Where are your horses?"

"We have none."

"On foot, are you?"

"No, we came in yonder ship."

They looked at the air-ship for the first time, and then made a rush for it. Barney and Pomp were on board, expecting a call for the rifles.

"Halt!" cried Frank, very promptly.

They halted in surprise, and the leader turned on him and asked:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean for you to halt," was the reply.

"Do you dare halt Mexicans on Mexican soil!" hissed the leader, handling his *escapet* threateningly.

"Yes, when Mexicans make a rush for my property."

"You are my prisoners—all of you!" exclaimed the bandit chief.

"You are mistaken, senor. You forget we are Americans, who are prisoners to no man."

The bandits turned and leveled their guns at Frank and his two friends.

But the next moment Barney and Pomp gave them a volley from the deck of the air-ship, and two of them tumbled headlong to the ground.

The bandits were utterly dumfounded.

They wheeled round to face the unknown foe, when Frank, Sallinger and Kensel opened on them with their revolvers. Then Barney and Pomp gave them another round.

That was too much.

They fell on their knees and cried out:

"Quarter! Quarter! We surrender!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANK TEACHES A WHOLESOME LESSON TO THE NATIVES.

THE terror of the bandits was unbounded.

They were the veriest of cowards—men who were bullies where numerical strength gave them the advantage.

They believed that they were three to one when they first came into the camp, but when Barney and Pomp fired on them from the air-ship they suspected that they were outnumbered, hence their sudden abject begging for quarter.

Six of their number lay on the ground, three of whom were dead, and a fourth was gasping in his death agony.

The leader was unhurt, but was on his knees begging like a dog for his life.

"What's the matter with you?" Frank asked.

"Quarter—quarter!" cried the villain, in the most abject fashion.

"Why, you have quarter?—you had it before you came here. What are you making such a fuss about?"

The bandit did not know what reply to make to such a query. The truth is he didn't really know what was the matter with him.

"I've met such Mexicans as you before," said Frank, "and know how to deal with them. We whipped out this country once and can do it again with the greatest ease in the world. Now you fellows had better make yourselves very scarce around here."

They needed no second bidding. Without casting a look at their wounded companions, they marched away in the darkness of the night, and were seen no more.

"Now we want to leave here and at once," said Frank. "Those fellows will rouse up the natives around here and seek revenge by attacking us before daylight. Get aboard at once."

They went aboard, where Pomp and Barney already had possession, and Frank at once set the rotascope going.

In another minute the air-ship was rising above the tree tops and sailing in a westerly course, following the valley.

When they had gone about ten miles they settled down on the banks of the same stream within a few feet of the water.

"We can all turn in here and sleep," said Frank, "as nobody knows where we are. In the morning we will build a fire and cook breakfast. Then we'll go back and catch on where we left off, and go on with the survey."

"That's very easily done," said Sallinger.

"Yes," said Kensel. "We gave 'em the grand dodge, didn't we?"

"I should say we did. But wasn't Barney and Pomp right up to snuff, though?"

"Oh, I knew they were right on the ragged edge of a fight all the time," said Frank, laughing. "Those old boys never failed me yet in the hour of danger. I am never uneasy when they are around."

Pomp grinned and Barney smiled, as they heard what the young inventor said.

They turned in and went to sleep as though no human lives had been sacrificed that night.

Early the next morning Barney and Pomp were up building the fire by which to cook breakfast.

Frank and the others were soon up, also, preparing to try their luck at fishing in the stream.

Just as they had cast their hooks in the water Pomp, who was busy making a pot of coffee, felt himself seized by the collar and yanked around as if a giant had hold of him.

"Hi, dar!" he called. "Lef go dar, I tole yer!"

He heard a gruff voice speak in Spanish, and then felt a violent kick under his coat-tail.

That was enough.

He crawled out of his coat in the twinkling of an eye, and confronted his assailant, who proved to be a big, burly Mexican farmer.

"Wha' for yer kick me?" exclaimed Pomp.

"Hold on there, Pomp!" called Frank, start-

ing to return to the fire to see what the Mexican wanted.

But Pomp's wool was up.

He bowed his head and made a dash at the burly Mexican, striking him in the stomach with such force as to lay him on his back, with all the breath completely knocked out of him.

"On, thunder! Why didn't you wait?" said Frank.

"He kicked me, Marse Frank," answered Pomp, his eyes dancing with rage.

"What did he want?"

"Reckon he wanted me ter butt 'im," he replied, "an' I done it," and he shook his head as though he would like to do it again.

The Mexican was knocked out so thoroughly that it was several minutes ere he was able to pull himself together again.

When he was able to set up he felt very ill, and looked helplessly around.

"Senor," said Frank, "you are ill. Have a glass of wine and you will feel better."

The Mexican seemed surprised at hearing good Spanish spoken, as well as at the kindly tone of the speaker. He looked up at Frank and said:

"Senor, I am hurt. I shall kill the black man."

"The black man is my servant, senor," said Frank. "I shall order him to kill you if that is your intention in regard to him."

The Mexican swore in Castilian, and said:

"I am a gentleman, and—"

"But you acted like a brute, sir," said Frank, "to come into my camp and begin booting my servant. But then I suppose you are a fair sample of a Mexican gentleman."

"Who are you who thus insult a Mexican gentleman on his own estate?"

"I am an American citizen," replied the young American, "traveling through Mexico on business, and I must say you are the worst specimen of your nation I have met with yet."

The Mexican was now on his feet. He was boiling over with rage, and towered at least a foot above Frank.

Barney, Sallinger and Kensel had crowded around to see and hear all that was done or said.

"You are on my property," said the Mexican, haughtily, "and I want you to leave at once!"

Frank coolly took out his watch and noted the time.

"We shall leave in just one hour to the minute, senor. We have not had our breakfast yet."

"You will leave now—at once—or take the consequences," said the irate son of the soil.

"In one hour, senor."

"Then I'll summon my peons and have you all arrested," and he started to leave.

"Senor, I arrest you!" said Frank, "and will hold you till I am ready to go. Hold up your hands!"

Frank covered him with his revolver.

The Mexican turned pale, but made no motion to obey the order.

"Hold up your hands, or I'll put an ounce of lead through you!" hissed Frank.

Up went his hands.

"Go through him, Pomp, and see if he is armed."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp advanced to search him. The Mexican drew back.

"Why this indignity?" he asked.

"Simply to teach you how to be a gentleman in the future," replied Frank. "A gentleman would have asked the servant to show him the master, and to him he would have addressed himself. Do you catch on to the lesson?"

Pomp went through him, and found no weapon but a small dagger.

"Dat's all he hab got, Marse Frank," said Pomp, as he finished the search.

"That isn't much of a weapon to have," remarked Frank. "Now, senor, you will take your seat there by the fire and keep us company till we are ready to leave your estate."

The Mexican had made up his mind that he had run into a hornet's nest, and thought the best thing he could do would be implicit obedience.

He took a seat on a stone and gazed around at the other without uttering a word.

"Kensel, please keep guard over him while Sallinger and I catch some fish for our breakfast."

"Yes, I'll keep him all right," replied Kensel, drawing his revolver and taking a seat not far from the prisoner.

In a little while they had fish enough for breakfast, and Pomp soon had them in the pan.

When breakfast was ready, Frank invited his prisoner to partake of it with them. But he surlily declined.

Our heroes then ate and seemed to enjoy the joke they had played on the Mexican.

When the meal was ended, they lit cigars and enjoyed a smoke, whilst Barney and Pomp put

the dishes and cooking utensils back on board the air-ship.

"All aboard!" cried Frank.

They sprang aboard, and a minute later the air-ship began to ascend.

The Mexican sprang to his feet and fairly howled in his dismay at seeing them going up through the air.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GOOD DAY'S WORK.

As the air-ship shot upward Barney and Pomp laughed derisively at the Mexican.

They yelled at him, called to him to come up and go with them. But he did not understand a word they said.

"I guess he will have something to think about the rest of his days," remarked Kensel.

"Yes, indeed," said Sallinger. "I never saw such an astonished man in all my life."

"It gets away with him completely," said Frank. "He never dreamed that we were going to fly up through the air right before his eyes."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "he's a sick Mexican."

"Dat's er fac", Barney. I gib 'im one good one in de belly. He doan make nuffin' er kickin' dis chile, I tole yer."

"You came near knocking him out, too, Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes, sah, I was mad, Marse Frank."

"Well, he wishes he had been a little more polite, I guess," said Kensel.

"Of course he does. I had half a mind to make Pomp butt him again when he began to talk so saucy."

Pomp grinned and looked as though nothing would have pleased him so well as to have had the chance to give him a dozen butts.

"I saw him tackle three Indians once," said Frank, "and butted them all out in less than two minutes. The redskins hardly knew what ailed them."

"Were they armed?"

"Yes, but Pomp's mode of attack broke 'em all up. They were not used to it."

The air-ship sailed back up the valley to where they met the bandits the night before.

"Hello!" cried Frank. "There's a crowd of people at the camp."

"Yes, so there is. They are looking at the dead men we left there last night."

The crowd were greatly excited, and it was some time ere any one looked up and saw the air-ship.

But when they did see it they set up a wild yelling. Some of them ran home as fast as their heels could carry them. Others seemed to be too much paralyzed to move from the spot, but stood and gazed upwards as if they feared some great danger was impending.

Our heroes made no demonstration of any kind, but went quietly to work to resume the survey where they had left off.

Then they turned about and sailed westward again, going over the very ground they had passed over the night before.

"We are all right now for a good day's work," said Sallinger.

"Yes; and I hope we will find the route a good one for a railroad," said Frank, "for this is the richest country in the world through here, when one takes climate and soil into consideration."

They passed the spot where they had left the burly Mexican that morning, and found that he had gone home.

"He lives near by here, I guess," said Charlie Kensel. "I'd like to see him again."

"So would I," said Sallinger. "I would like to hear his opinion of flyingships and Americans in general."

"You would not find it very flattering, I can assure you," said Frank.

"Of course not, but I would like to hear it all the same."

"Ah! there's another town—quite a large one, too," said Kensel, who had been looking out ahead during the conversation.

It was in the distance and the field-glass was brought into use.

Frank gazed at the large collection of houses for a minute or two, and then handed the glass to Sallinger.

"It is quite a city," remarked the latter, as he gazed through the glass.

"Yes, but we don't want to stop there and have an Alcalde guzzling down all our wine," said Frank.

"No—don't stop. Just pass over the town and give 'em a good scare. I am sorry we have no big tin trumpet on board with which to give 'em a toot. They'd all think the end of time had come."

"Yes. I have seen Americans frightened al-

most to death that way. We nearly broke up a camp-meeting once by flying through the air blowing an immense tin trumpet."

The town came into better view every moment, as did the rich haciendas all around it for many miles.

They judged the town to hold about ten thousand inhabitants. Most of the houses, however, were miserable adobes, showing that the majority were of the poorer class.

The air-ship was nearly over the town when it was discovered. Then the people ran out into the streets and behaved like so many lunatics just turned loose.

"Just look at 'em!" exclaimed Kensel. "Did you ever see people so much excited?"

"I never did," said Sallinger.

"Bedad, but it's crazy, they are," remarked Barney.

"Dat's er fac'," chimed in Pomp. "They don't know what to make of the air-ship," said Frank. "Such a thing as a small ship sailing through the air a few years ago would have set any people in the world crazy."

"Well, they seem nearly crazy down there."

"Yes. It would open their eyes if we were to drop down there and tell them all about the mystery of the air-ship. But we have other work to do."

"Yes. I think we ought to push the survey through in two or three days more," said Sallinger.

"Two days ought to bring us in sight of the ocean," replied Frank.

"Then we shall have completed one of the most wonderful surveys of the age, I think."

"No doubt of that; and the world will so regard it, too."

By and by the town was left behind, and the valley seemed to stretch away to a great distance. But along toward sunset a mountain range loomed up in front of them.

"Ah, there's the end of this valley!" said Kensel, as he gazed at the mountain.

Sallinger looked disappointed for a moment or two, but, seizing a glass, he made a sweeping survey of the range.

"There's an outlet for this river below us somewhere," he said, "or else it runs up hill—a thing I never knew a river to do by itself yet."

"You are right about that," said Frank. "It flows through a gap somewhere, you may depend upon it."

"But why can't we see it? It appears to be a solid mountain range in front of us."

"Because we are too far off to see where the gap winds around some spur, perhaps, which prevents us from seeing through it—at least, that is the only explanation I can give of it."

"Well, we'll know more about it when we get there."

In an hour's time they were near enough to the mountains to see where the little river ran through.

It entered a narrow gap, which made a sharp curve to the left after going a few hundred yards, which accounted for the appearance of a solid mountain at a long distance.

"We want to get down low as we go through that gap," said Sallinger, "as I want to see whether or not it is possible to run a railroad through there."

"We can sail as low as you wish," replied Frank, proceeding to lower the altitude of the air-ship.

As they entered the gap they were hundreds of feet below the tops of the peaks on either side of the river.

"It is mostly rock," said Sallinger, "and very solid rock at that."

"Yes," returned Kensel. "They will have some blasting to do here."

"But no tunneling," remarked Frank. "I think the passage is wide enough to permit a railroad track to be laid along the banks of the river."

The gap was about three and one half miles in length, and then it emerged into a sloping tableland, with level country in the dim distance beyond.

The current of the little river became a roaring rapid for many miles. In one place they espied a beautiful cascade—the entire river going over a shelving rock in an unbroken body, falling a distance of fifty or sixty feet.

"What better place than that do we want for a camp?" Kensel asked, as he looked down at the cascade.

"It suits me well enough," said Sallinger.

"I have no objection to it," remarked Frank. "Maybe Pomp might not like it."

Pomp grinned from ear to ear, and said:

"Dat's er nice place down dar, Marse Frank, an' plenty ob fish an' b'ar steak fo' ter eat."

"Bear steaks! Where are any bear steaks?"

"Down dar on dat big rock by de water," said

Pomp, pointing to a big black bear sitting on a flat rock within a few feet of the water's edge.

They looked down and saw the bear as Pomp had described him.

"By George, there he is!" cried Kensel.

"Yes, and a big fellow he is, too," said Sallinger.

"He has heard us," Frank said, "and doesn't know where we are. Just watch him looking for us. He is right where we want to land. Have your guns ready to fire as soon as we settle down by him."

"Good heavens!" gasped Sallinger, "what do you want to drop right down into his mouth for?"

"Why, to make sure of killing him," said Frank, laughing. "You are not afraid of him, are you?"

"Oh, no, of course. But I don't want to scare the bear too much," replied Sallinger.

Frank roared with laughter, and Kensel exclaimed:

"Just my fix, too. Just land on the other side and give the bear a chance."

"Well, we'll sail around low and take him on the wing."

The air-ship settled down almost directly over the falls, and then, for the first time, the bear caught sight of it.

He reared on his haunches, and glared at it as if ready to tackle it the moment it came within his reach.

"Now all of you take good aim at him," said Frank, "and fire at once, to make sure of having some bear-steak for supper."

They all had their rifles ready, and when the air-ship was low enough to give them a chance to put in a good shot they blazed away.

The bear was paralyzed by four bullets at such short range, and fell over on the rock in convulsive agony.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BARNEY AND THE BEAR—A SHAD THAT DIDN'T PAN OUT WELL.

WHEN the air-ship settled down on the rock the bear was stone dead.

Barney was the first to leap out and touch the prize, and Pomp was the next.

"Sure, an' he's foine one," said Barney.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Make er fire, Barney, an' I'll cook yer a big slice."

"Bedad, thin, it's a big foire I'll make."

Frank and the others examined the prize with a great deal of satisfaction.

"He is a fine specimen," said Kensel.

"Yes, a very fine," added Frank, "but you want to look out for the mate. They go in pairs, you know."

Both Sallinger and Kensel grasped their rifles, and looked uneasily around them.

"Oh, they are not so dangerous as serpents," said Frank, laughing. "I never knew a bear to snatch a fellow without giving him warning. They always growl."

"But don't they chase a fellow?" Kensel asked.

"Yes, they have been known to do so, but the fellow always outran them. A bear isn't much on the run."

"Well, I don't care to have one chase me," remarked Sallinger. "I am not much on the run myself."

"Well, a bear would have to get up and hump himself to catch me," said Kensel. "I am pretty good on a foot race, and, with a hungry bear behind me, I think I could outrun anything in the world."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, grinning. "A man doan know what he kin do till a b'ar gits atter 'im."

Barney went to work gathering wood for a fire, whilst Pomp applied himself to the task of taking the hams off the dead bear.

Frank and the other two were busy about the air-ship, arranging things for the night.

Barney had an ax with which to cut wood, and was chopping away like a regular woodsman, when they heard him yell like a Comanche.

"Good Lord!" cried Kensel, "what's the matter with Barney?"

"Ooh, take that, ye dirty blaggard!" they heard Barney cry, and there followed a fierce growl.

Frank seized a rifle and made a break to go to Barney's assistance.

Pomp dropped his big butcher-knife, snatched up a rifle, and rushed after Frank.

"Come on, Kensel!" cried Sallinger, "let's go too and see what it means."

They all rushed into the woods, and soon found Barney standing over a big black bear, which was rolling over and over on the ground in the agonies of death.

"Hello!" cried Frank. "You've laid him out, have you?"

"Yis, sorr. The dirty blaggard came up an'

tapped me wid his paw behoid me back. Sare an' I wheeled round an' clipped 'im on the hid wid me ax."

"Bully for you, Barney," said Frank. "You laid him out the first round."

"Yis, ther baste."

Kensel and Sallinger were astonished at the prowess of the Irishman, and thought his exploit ought to make him famous.

"It was the mate of the one we shot," said Frank.

"Then we have nothing more to fear from bears to-night?" said Kensel.

"No. They are out of the way now."

"Well, I am glad of it. Did he hurt you, Barney?"

"Sure an' he nearly kilt me wid froight."

"Fright! Oh, that's nothing."

"Nothin'! Sure an' it's mesilf as wud as soon be kilt entirely as scared ter death."

"So had I, Barney," said Frank, laughing.

"Dat's er fac," put in Pomp.

"What shall we do with two dead bears?" Sallinger asked.

"We must throw 'em into the river," said Frank, "or other beasts of prey will fight over them all night, thus disturbing our slumbers."

Just as the sun was sinking out of sight Barney and Pomp threw the two carcasses into the river, after taking the hams from one of them.

The strong current soon carried them away out of sight, and then our heroes settled down to enjoy the balmy evening.

Pomp broiled the bear steaks and made a pot of excellent coffee, and our heroes feasted to their hearts' content.

"This was quite an adventure," remarked Kensel as he filled his pipe and prepared for a comfortable smoke.

"Yes, and a profitable one for us," returned Frank. "We can have a number of square meals off that ham. Pomp knows how to keep fresh meat even in the warmest season of the year."

"That is a valuable secret, is it not?" Kensel asked.

"I don't think it is any secret at all, but the knowledge is worth something to some people."

"I'll have to get him to tell me how to do it, as I have some friends in New York who would be benefitted by it, I am sure."

"Yes, he'll give it to you any time you wish. He has picked up a good deal of information in his travels round the world."

That night Pomp concluded to try his luck at fishing, as the water was not five paces from the fire. He baited a hook with a small piece of bear meat and cast it into the stream.

In a few minutes he got a bite, and the next moment he drew out a bright, shining scale fish, not unlike a shad, and weighing about two pounds.

"What kind of a fish is that, Pomp?" Kensel asked.

"Doon no, sah," replied Pomp. "He looks like er shad, but he ain't one."

"How do you know he isn't one?"

"Cause shad doan nebbber bite no hook."

"Eh! Shad don't bite at bait?"

"No, sah, dey doan't."

Kensel was puzzled.

He looked around at Frank.

"He is right," said Frank. "No man ever knew a shad to bite a hook. They are only caught in nets and seines."

"I believe you are right, but I never thought of that before. We learn something every day."

"Yes, and another thing about the shad is that of all fish that come upon our tables we know less about him."

"How is that?" Sallinger asked.

"Because we know nothing about him save the fact that he runs up the rivers of that Atlantic coast every spring, and spawns, and then drifts back to the ocean in summer. But where he goes and where he stays till the next spring no fellow has ever found out. They have never been caught or even found out of season—nor are they ever caught in the ocean. All other fish we know something about—their haunts and habits, but the shad puzzles us."

"Well, that's more than I ever knew about the shad before," said Sallinger. "And yet he is my favorite above all other fish."

"So he is with me," put in Kensel.

"I have been thinking a long time," continued Frank, "of trying to invent a little machine that would extract all the bones out of a shad. There's millions in it."

"Yes, and a million of bones in each shad," remarked Kensel.

"Yes, and a million dollars in the machine," added Frank.

"I am sure of it," said Sallinger.

They spent the night by the cascade, where the music of the falling waters lulled them to sleep, and on the following morning were up early

casting hooks into the stream with the intent of having fish for breakfast.

In a little while they had a half dozen fish like the one Pomp had caught the night before, and which so much resembled shad in appearance.

"Oh, we have more than we can eat all day," said Kensel.

"Yes—let Pomp put some of them in the pan at once," replied Frank.

Pomp had the pan ready, and in a few minutes two of the fish were in it.

Our heroes kept on catching more fish for the sport—throwing back fish after fish as fast as caught.

"De Lor' gorrarity!" they heard Pomp exclaim, as he worked at the fire where the pan of fish was frying. "Dar ain't no fish for breakfast!"

"What's the matter, Pomp?" Frank asked.

"Dem fish ain't no good, Marse Frank," said Pomp, looking in the pan, which revealed a quantity of oil and a lot of fish bones.

"What's the matter with them?"

"Dey's nuffin' but fish-ile, Marse Frank."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sah—look at dat," and he came forward with the pan and made the exhibit of the oil and bones.

"That's true," said Frank. "I remember seeing such fish once before. We won't have any fish for breakfast this morning."

"By George!" said Kensel, "I don't understand this. What's the matter with those fish?"

"They melt away to nothing but oil when placed in the pan," remarked Frank.

Sallinger and Kensel insisted on being allowed to see another fish put in the pan. Pomp did so, and they saw it quickly rendered into oil.

"They are a little too rich for me," said Kensel. "I'll take bear-steak and coffee this morning."

"So will I," said Sallinger.

So they sat down to breakfast on bear-steak, little dreaming of the surprise that was in store for them.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SERPENTINE PASSENGER.

OUR heroes ate a hearty breakfast of bearsteak, coffee, and bread and butter.

Then they indulged in a smoke, whilst Barney and Pomp put things to rights and arranged the dishes and cooking utensils in their proper places.

In due time the air-ship was ready to sail, and Frank called out:

"All aboard!"

They were all on board, and Barney at once set the telescope going.

The air-ship went up with a beautiful steadiness that attested a perfect working in every department of her machinery.

"This is one of the finest mornings we have had for a week," remarked Kensel.

"Yes," said Sallinger, "I was just going to remark it myself. The air is still and yet laden with the perfume of flowers."

"Yes, and I sometimes think Mexico has the most fragrant flowers in the world."

"She is particularly rich in that respect," said Frank. "But the most remarkable country in the world is Australia. There they have the most beautiful birds in the world, but they have no voice save harsh, grating sounds; and while the most beautiful flowers bloom there they have no fragrance."

"I have read of such things," said Sallinger, "but have no desire to see them. The most lovely flower is nothing to me if it has no perfume, and—"

"Ugh! augh! Oh, de lor' gorrarmighty!" yelled Pomp, upsetting two stools in the cabin and madly dashing out on deck, where Frank and the other two were smoking and talking.

Ere Frank could ask what was the matter an immense snake crawled out from the cabin in hot pursuit of Pomp, hissing like escaping steam.

"Good Lord!" gasped Sallinger.

"A snake!" yelled Frank. "Look out—don't let him get hold of you!"

The snake was as large as a man's leg, and had fangs that made the blood run cold in our hero's veins. But he was between them and the cabin, and seeing four instead of one, he stopped and began to coil himself to act on the defensive.

Frank drew his revolver and aimed at the serpent's head. He fired, and the bullet missed the head, but lodged in the coil.

That set the serpent into a fighting rage. He struck out for Frank, but the young hero fired again, and so close to the serpent's head was the revolver, that it became alarmed and made a break for the side of the airship.

The next moment it went overboard, and a ferment:

"Thank God!" went up from every one on board, and they rushed to the side of the airship to peer over at the falling snake.

It appeared to be twelve or fifteen feet long as it squirmed, twisted and turned over and over in its descent.

"It will strike on a rock!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw the course of the descent.

So it did, and it struck so hard that our heroes heard it at the height of a quarter of a mile.

"That killed him!" cried Kensel.

"Of course it did. Nothing could stand such a fall as that!"

"Let us down, Barney," said Frank. "I want to see that snake when he isn't quite so dangerous. I never had such a surprise in my life."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, his wool returning to its natural kink again.

"Where did you run across him, Pomp?"

"Lor' sabs us!" gasped Pomp. "De fust ting I knowed I heered de hissia', an' I looked down an' dar he war on de floor er axin' fo' his breckfuss. I doan' say nuffin', but jes' skipped outen dar quickern lightnin'. Dis am de wuestest country in de worl' fo' snakes."

"I believe you," said Kensel, who had a deep aversion to all serpents.

"How did he get on board?" Sallinger asked.

"He must have crawled aboard when we were eating breakfast. He could not have done so at any other time without being seen. He was an ugly fellow."

"I should say he was. I don't think I ever had such a fright in all my life," and Sallinger's looks confirmed his words.

"I shall look under my bed every night after this, like an old maid, to see if there's a snake under there," said Kensel. "As for Pomp, it's a wonder he didn't turn white."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, grinning.

By this time the air-ship had settled down within a few feet of the monster serpent, and all hands got out to take a look at it.

"He was a big one," remarked one.

"And an ugly fellow," said another.

"Yes. I wouldn't care to tackle him alone."

"Bedad," said Barney, "he could squeeze the loife out av a stump, bad cess till 'im."

They measured him and found that he was about thirteen feet in length.

"Big enough," said Frank.

"Too big for me," said Kensel.

"Just thirteen feet too long for me," added Sallinger. "I'd rather have anything else around than the likes of him."

"Sure an' it's the thruth yez are spakin'."

"Dat's er fac."

"All aboard!" cried Frank.

"Look through the ship for more snakes," suggested Kensel.

"Yes," said Sallinger. "Make sure we haven't any more such passengers on board."

Barney and Pomp quickly made a search, and found nothing to create any alarm. Then they once more ascended, and the survey was resumed.

The view toward the west was a grand one for our heroes.

The land sloped gradually toward the coast, and the beautiful river went leaping and bounding on its way to the sea, sparkling like molten silver in the sunlight.

"There can be no difficulty in building a road through here," said Kensel.

"None in the least," replied Sallinger. "I never saw a more beautiful country for railroad-ing. It will be a long grade, though, from the mountains to the sea level."

"Yes, but as it is not a steep one: it will give no trouble."

"We shall begin to strike the orange, lemon and cocoanut," said Frank, as he looked over the grand panorama below.

"How about the banana?"

"It am dar," said Pomp, a broad grin on his honest black face.

"It is, eh?"

"Yes, sah," and he smacked his lips in anticipation of a feast on the delicious fruit.

"You like 'em, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"Next to the watermelon give Pomp a bunch of ripe bananas," said Frank.

"Oh! The watermelon comes first, eh?"

"Yes, sah. De watermilyun am de nigger's pie, every time, sah."

"I've always heard that the 'possum was the colored man's best dish," said Kensel.

"De 'possum in de winter an' de water-milyun in de summer, sah," said Pomp.

"Oh, everything has its season, I see."

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac."

"When is the chicken in season?"

"Dey am in season fourteen months in de year, sah," replied Pomp, grinning from ear to ear.

There was a general roar of approbation at the truthful reply of the representative of his race.

The air-ship moved westward with a steady pace, the country gradually became more level, till a broad river came into view.

"What a beautiful river!" exclaimed Kensel, as he noticed the silvery reflection of the sun's rays for miles and miles.

"What a lovely forest on both sides of it!" cried Sallinger.

"But between that river and the ocean you will see some arid plains where it is extremely difficult for one to support life," remarked Frank.

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I passed through here a few years ago with Barney and Pomp. There is little inducement for an enterprising man to settle on the west coast of Mexico. I don't know what effect a railroad will have on it, though."

"That is something no man can tell."

"No; time alone can solve that problem."

They reached the river, and then decided to stop there during the afternoon and night, provided they could find a suitable place for a camp.

"There's an orange grove over there," said Frank, pointing to the left where he could see the yellow fruit by means of the field glass.

"Well, let's drop down in that grove, by all means," suggested Kensel.

"And be arrested for trespassing?"

"Who in thunder can arrest this crowd, I'd like to know?"

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, whose mouth was watering for a taste of a dozen oranges.

"Bedad, it's spoilin' for a scrimmage, I am," said Barney.

Frank had charge of the ship, and guided it right down into the orange grove, where the trees were hanging full of the ripe, delicious fruit.

"Now gather quick," he said, "and let's away before the owner gets after us."

They all sprang out and in less than ten minutes had nearly a barrel of ripe oranges on board.

"Now come aboard," said Frank, "and let's be off before we are discovered."

They hurried on board, and the rotoscope had just begun to revolve when the deep baying of a pack of blood-hounds was heard.

"They have turned the dogs loose," said Frank.

"Let 'em come," said Kensel. "I never saw a dog yet that could fly."

Just as the air-ship cleared the ground the blood-hounds came bounding up to it. They sprang up and tried to catch hold of it. Barney threw out the end of a rope which had a knot on the end of it.

One of the blood-hounds caught the knot in his mouth with a savageness that made Kensel shudder.

But when Barney attempted to pull the rope in he found that the blood-hound had buried his teeth in the knot, and either could not or would not let go of it.

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney. "I've got the bloody baste!"

The dog was nearly as heavy as Barney himself, and but for the fact that it was fastened to one of the stanchions he would have been drawn overboard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ASTONISHED DOG—POMP GETS AWAY WITH SALLINGER.

As the air-ship ascended the big dog was drawn up from out of the yelping pack.

He struggled hard to free himself, and yelped with terror as he felt himself being drawn up.

"Hi, dar!" yelled Pomp, as he took in the situation. "Dat dog am comin' attar us!"

"What in thunder are you doing, Barney!" called Frank.

"Bedad, it's the dog, sor!" replied Barney. "Sure, an' he wantter go wid us!"

"He's treed us!" said Pomp.

By this time the dog was sailing above the tree tops, and the yelping pack below raised a tremendous hullabaloo over the matter.

Crack! went a gun from the orange grove, and a bullet whistled close by Barney's ear.

Then came a series of wild Mexican whoops, and a man, gun in hand, was seen running about yelling like a lunatic.

But the blood-hounds made such a racket that it was impossible to make out what he was saying.

"I am sorry for the dog," said Frank, "for he is game to the last."

"Yes," said Kensel. "Can't we save him in some way? I'd hate to see him fall."

"I don't know how. He would kill one of us were we to pull him on board."

"Go over the river and descend low enough to let him down into the water. Then we can draw

him up near enough to cut the rope and let him swim out."

"Good! I'll do it," and the course of the ship was changed so as to take it over the river.

There it was lowered till the dog was in the water.

Then the air-ship also settled down in the water. Barney drew his knife and drew the dog up to within a few feet of him and cut the rope.

The moment he felt himself freed from the ship the dog struck out for the bank.

When he reached the land he climbed up out of the water, shook the damp from his sides, and made a break for home at the top of his speed.

"That dog will never forget his experience to-day as long as he lives," said Frank, laughing at the tremendous speed the dog was making.

"What must that Mexican think?" Kensel asked, gazing at that worthy a half mile away.

"Oh, he thinks the evil days have come, and will cross himself forty times a minute every time he thinks of us."

"How are the oranges?" Frank asked.

They had forgotten all about them in the excitement about the dog.

But now they fell to and tested them.

They were delicious—they had ripened on the tree, which the oranges that get to New York never do.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Kensel, "I never tasted such sweet oranges in my life."

"No; I suppose not. That is the way to get a good orange—let it ripen on the tree. It makes a vast difference in the flavor and sweetness."

"Yes, I suppose it does. I don't think I really ever had as many oranges as I wanted to eat. I am going to eat all I want this time."

"That's right. There's enough on board for all of us."

During this conversation the air-ship floated down the river on the current. In a little while they had passed below the orange grove, and were on their way down the river, eating and talking over the dog adventure.

Thus several miles were passed, and every one had eaten as many oranges as he wanted.

"Dars de bananas!" cried Pomp, he having been on the lookout for that delicious fruit all the time.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sallinger, "there they are. Sorry I haven't room for any of them."

"I see gwine ter hab some," said Pomp.

"Yes, we may as well have a couple of bunches," said Frank, "but there are men at work over there, so we may as well buy them."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, "but dey ain't good dat way, Marse Frank, yer know."

Frank laughed.

So did Barney and Pomp.

"Where does the laugh come in?" Sallinger asked.

"They were alluding to the old school-boy idea that a watermelon was not good unless it had been stolen out of some man's patch."

"Oh, yes. I heard that myself when I was a school-boy."

Barney hallooed to the men in the field, and two of them came down to the river bank.

"Will you sell us two bunches of ripe bananas?" Frank asked in Spanish.

"Si, senor," replied one of the men, who proved to be the owner of the place.

Frank guided the air-ship to the bank, and while waiting for one of the laborers to bring the fruit, the Mexican asked:

"What kind of a boat is that, senor?"

"It is a common kind, such as we use in our country."

"What is your country, senor?"

"The Moon."

"The Moon?"

"Si, senor."

The Mexican stared at him a moment as if mentally measuring him.

"You jest, senor," he said.

"Indeed we do not, senor. We live in the moon, and will go back as soon as we have seen more of this beautiful country."

The Mexican wondered how so many lunatics had come together in that part of the world. Yet he could not but see that they were not insane people—on the contrary they looked like very sensible people.

The laborer brought the bananas, and the owner refused to take any pay for them, doubtless thinking it would be bad policy to do so.

"We are very grateful to you, senor," said Frank, "and will not forget your kindness. We shall prove to you that we live in the moon, as I see you do not believe me."

Frank set the rotoscope going, and the Mexican looked on in amazement. It was the strangest boat he had ever seen, and did not know what to make of an immense revolving umbrella over it.

But when he and his laborers saw the boat rise

up out of the water and sail westward, they uttered exclamations of terror and threw themselves on their knees, and crossed themselves at the rate of ten crosses per minute.

"They are the worst scared lot I ever saw," said Kensei, laughing.

"You may well say that, for they fully believe that we are part of old Nick's gang, or else really do belong to the moon."

"I don't wonder at that. I would have thought so too, under the circumstances, no doubt."

"Yes, and so would almost anyone else."

"We are making due west now."

"Yes," replied Frank, "but I think we had better follow the river a few miles and then camp for the night, otherwise we would have very dry surroundings."

"Let's stay by the river, then."

"Why not follow the river to the coast?" Kensei asked.

"Because it does not make a straight course for the ocean. We want to make the nearest point, and then seek a good harbor."

"Yes, that's the point," said Sallinger. "I think we can make the ocean to-morrow."

"Oh, of course. We are within a half day's sail of it now," remarked Frank.

They kept along the course of the river for about ten miles, eating oranges and bananas all the way.

Kensei ate until he could not swallow another piece, and then said:

"I have done what was my one great desire when I was a boy."

"What was that?" Sallinger asked.

"Eaten just as many oranges as I wanted. I couldn't eat another if my life depended on it."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "When I was er boy, I wanted 'em jes' dat way, too, sah."

"How about watermelons, Pomp?"

"Bress de Lor', honey, dis chile got 'em ebry time he went for 'em," and he grinned all over his face as he spoke.

"And you didn't pay for them, either, eh?"

"No, sah."

"Nor raise them yourself?"

"Yes, sah, I raised 'em—right off'n de vines an' ober de fence."

They roared over the truthfulness of the old dandy.

"Give me your hand, Pomp," said Kensei. "You are an honest man. I raised large crops just that way myself when I was a boy."

Pomp shook hands with him, and seemed happy at having met a man who had farmed after his style.

"Oh, you two think you are the only honest men on board, do you?" said Sallinger. "You are very much mistaken. I have been not only a farmer, but a fruit raiser besides."

"De Lor' sabe us!" gasped Pomp. "Did yer took apples an' peaches an' plums an' sich?"

"Yes," replied Sallinger, "and took the stomach-ache, too."

Pomp shook his head with an air of disgust.

"Bad boy," he said. "Good boys take de water-milky'n—dat's all right; but dem little fruits—bah!"

Frank and Kensei roared at Sallinger's expense, and the latter joined in, saying:

"The old man has got the best of me, but I'll get even with him yet."

"You acknowledge that you are not one of us good boys, though, don't you?" Kensei asked.

"Hardly," was the reply. "I think I was as bad as any of you."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, at which there was another roar.

"Oh, well, old man," said Sallinger, "just wait till I get on to you. I'm coming—don't forget that."

"No, sah. I'll be dar when yer come."

Sallinger shook hands with him, and said:

"I like you, Pomp, old man, and I'll prove it to you some day."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

"Bedad," said Barney, "a thim oranges hez made the naygur as sharp as a fishhook."

"Dat's er fac," Barney, returned Pomp. "Yer want ter eat 'em ebry day. Dey'll do yer good."

"Steady, now!" cried Frank. "We are going down!"

They looked out and saw a small clearing on the river bank, where they could have ample room for a camp. The air-ship soon settled down in a few paces of the water, and Barney sprang out to be the first to land.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARNEY'S ADVENTURE WITH AN ALLIGATOR.

BARNEY being the first one out of the ship he took a pail and ran to the river for water.

Just as he was about to stoop and dip the pail into the water an immense alligator lying just under the bank, struck him with his tail and

knocked him back five or six feet, completely stunning him.

The reptile then plunged into the water and disappeared from sight.

"Hi dar!" yelled Pomp—"look at Barney! De 'gator hit 'im!"

He ran to Barney and picked him up, shaking him to bring him to.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Frank. "The boy is hurt!"

They all ran to him to find him just recovering his wits, and looking around in a dazed sort of way.

No one but Pomp had seen the alligator, and Sallinger and Kensei were at a loss to understand what had happened.

"Barney, my boy," said Frank, as the Irishman began pulling himself together, "are you hurt?"

"I'm kilt," he said.

"I hope not, old fellow. I can't afford to lose you, you know."

"Phat was it, onyhov?"

"It was de 'gator, Barney," said Pomp.

"Bad cess to 'im, I'm broke all ter pieces. Luk around an' gather me up. Me back is knocked out er me," and he groaned as in the greatest agony.

"I didn't see any alligator," said Kensei.

"You heard the blow, did you not?" Frank asked.

"Yes, and it was enough to kill an ox."

"They have been known to kill an ox with a single blow of their tails. It is lucky for Barney the reptile did not seize and drag him under the water. That would have been the last of him."

They carried Barney inside the air-ship and put him in his berth. Frank gave him a drink of French brandy, and then proceeded to open the medicine-chest and get liniment to rub on his bruises.

Pomp built the fire without Barney's help that evening. Barney was too much broken up to do anything but groan and call down bad luck on all alligators.

While he was cooking supper Pomp looked out over the river and saw the alligator crawling up on the opposite bank.

"Dar he is! Dar's de 'gator, Massa Frank!" he cried out.

"Where? Where is he?" Frank asked, rushing out of the air-ship, gun in hand.

"Ober dar on de oder bank!"

Frank looked in the direction indicated, and saw a monster alligator stretching himself out at full length on the river bank.

Kensei and Sallinger saw him, too, and were eager to get a shot at him.

"Keep cool now," said Frank, "and we'll get him. All of you get your Winchesters and we'll have a shot at him."

All three got their rifles and joined Frank on the river bank.

"You want to aim right behind his forearm," said Frank, "and close up to the arm, too, or the ball can't break his shell. Take a good, steady aim, and when I count three all let him have it at once. If we don't kill him we'll make him mighty sick. Ready now."

All four aimed deliberately, and Frank counted:

"One—two—three!"

The four shots made but one report, and the alligator made but one jump. He seemed to bounce about a foot from the ground, and then lay still as a log, with but a slight twitching of the tail.

"Let him have another," said Frank. "Ready—

one—two—three!"

Again they fired all together, and the tail twitched more and more.

"Another in the same place."

And they gave him another volley, after which he lay still as a log.

"I guess that settled him," said Frank.

"I should say it did," remarked Kensei. "A dozen bullets is a big load to carry."

"Yes," said Sallinger, "and he got every one of them, too, I guess."

"No doubt of that. Hello, Barney."

"Begorra, let me say the baste!" said Barney, who had risen from his bed and come out to see the reptile that had knocked him out the first round.

"There he lies on the other bank over there—dead as a herring."

Barney gazed at the alligator in silence for a minute or two, and then said, shaking his fist at the carcass:

"Sure, an' I'd rather be mesilf than yees, yer blaggard," and then he hobbled back to his bed, feeling that he had been amply avenged.

But he groaned nearly all night with pain. The alligator had given him an awful blow. Frank had to rub liniment on him several times during the night, and give him liberal doses of French brandy.

The next morning he was sore from head to foot, but would get up and take another look at the dead alligator.

"Sure an' it's dead he is," he said.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

After breakfast they ascended again and moved back up the river to where they had left off the survey, and then started for the coast.

In an hour's time they struck the arid plains that lay between the river and the coast.

It was indeed an arid, dreary waste that was spread out before them. The only thing that could or would grow there was the giant cactus, which grew larger there than in any other part of the world.

"How do you account for the enormous size of the cactus here, Reade?" Sallinger asked.

"I don't know how to account for it," replied Frank. "It is something of a puzzle to me. I think, though, that the atmosphere has something to do with it—that it draws more sustenance from the air than from the earth."

"That is a good theory," said Kensei, "and a correct one, I think."

"It is the only one I have regarding the plant. I have seen them before, and regard them one of the great curiosities of Mexico."

"I would like to see one of the largest specimens," said Kensei.

"Take the glass and look out for one, and when you make a selection we will go down and take a look at it."

Kensei soon found a large one, and the air-ship settled down near it to enable our heroes to inspect it.

It was about thirty feet high, and some of the leaves were a foot thick, three feet wide and nearly ten feet long, with spines long enough to run through a man's body.

"I never saw anything like it in all my life," said Kensei.

"Nor I," added Sallinger. "This must be the native clime of the cactus."

"It may be. I am not well acquainted with the history of the plant," remarked Frank. "But these are said to be the most remarkable in the world."

"And I guess it is true," said Kensei.

"I want to cut some of the spines and keep them as curiosities," Sallinger said, looking about for some of the largest.

"You can find plenty of them. There are some very large ones over there."

Sallinger cut two very large ones and said that they would suffice, after which the air-ship ascended again and resumed its course toward the Pacific.

They sailed many miles of the wild and cactus waste, where no water course of any kind was seen.

"This is an awful country—the worst I ever saw," remarked Sallinger, looking at the dreary waste below. "No wonder no people live here. I don't see how animal life could be supported here."

"Very few animals are to be found in this region," said Frank. "It gets better as we near the coast."

"I hope it does, for this is simply repugnant to look upon."

"Hi dar!" yelled Pomp.

"Whoop!" echoed Barney.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Dar's de ocean, sah!"

"The ocean! The ocean!" cried Kensei and Sallinger, as they looked straight ahead and caught a glimpse of the blue Pacific in the hazy distance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OUR HERO WINS A BET.

THE sight of the ocean filled our heroes with supreme satisfaction.

It was such a relief to the eyes after having gazed all day on the arid cactus plains to see blue water once more.

How calm and placid the vast expanse of water was.

Not a ripple was to be seen, for no wind was blowing.

"I feel as if I never want to go out of sight of the ocean again," said Kensei.

"So do I," added Sallinger. "I am extremely fond of the water."

"Arrah now, be aisy," said Barney. "Sure, an' yez don't mane salt wather?"

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Kensei. "That lays you out, Sallinger!"

"What's the Irishman after me for?" Sallinger asked. "I never did him any harm."

Barney looked innocent as a lamb—as that he was not aware of the construction that had been placed on his question.

"Sure, an' would yez tell me where the laugh comes in?" he asked.

Another roar.

"Right there, Barney, old man," said Kensel; "laugh when we do, and you'll be sure to catch it every time."

"Beggorra, av I opened me mouth as yez be ather doin', it's a bad cowlid I'd catch!" replied Barney.

"That's true, Barney!" cried Sallinger, "he is always trying to get up a laugh where it doesn't belong."

"Dat's er fac!" exclaimed Pomp, whereat there was another hearty laugh.

"Oh, well, old man," said Kensel, "I owe you one, anyhow. If I should happen to shoot you some day, don't feel hurt with me?"

"No, sah, I won't, an' doan' yer be hurt wid me, needer," replied Pomp.

"All right. We understand each other now, don't we?"

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac."

"We shall soon be at the seashore," said Frank, "but I don't see any fresh water about where we can camp."

"Oh, we have water enough in the tank," said Kensel.

"So we have," answered Frank; "but I never drink warm water when I can get it cold."

"Neither do I, yet I can stand it one night if necessary."

"I can stand it a week as for that matter, but it is not necessary to do so. I think we had better move southward along the coast in quest of fresh water."

"I am heartily in favor of that," said Sallinger. "I wouldn't mind going all the way down to Patagonia if we followed the coast."

Frank turned the air-ship southward, and kept along the coast for a number of miles. In some places the shore was bold and rocky, and in others long stretches of sandy beach.

"How about a swim when we stop to-night?" said Kensel. "I think I could swim out a mile and back with the greatest relish in the world."

"Did you ever swim in salt water?"

"Many a time. I have swam a distance of three miles often."

"I'll wager you a suit of clothes that you can't swim five hundred yards in that water out there."

"I'll take that bet," said Kensel, very promptly, extending his hand to Frank.

"I dare you to make that bet with me, too," said Sallinger.

"Oh, I'll do that," said Frank, extending his hand to Sallinger, "and you, too, Barney, if you wish."

"Bedad, it's a suit av foine clothes I want," replied Barney, grasping his hand.

"It's a bet, is it?" Frank asked.

"Yes," replied all three at once.

"All right. We'll go down at once."

"Why don't you make a bet too, Pomp?" Kensel asked. "Can't you swim?"

"Yes, sah, I kin swim," said Pomp, "but dis ehile don't swim wid no sharks."

"Sharks!" yelled Sallinger and Kensel in a breath.

"Yes, sah. Dar's er millon sharks down dar in dat water."

Kensel and Sallinger looked at each other and then at Frank.

The young inventor smiled.

"Sold!" exclaimed Kensel.

"Sold!" echoed Sallinger.

"Beggorra!" cried Barney, "me bet is off."

"You're out a suit of clothes, Barney," replied Frank, laughing, "unless you make the swim of five hundred yards out from the beach."

"Sure an' wud yez lave me go?"

"Of course, if you are fool enough to take the risk. You should have thought of the sharks before you made the bet."

"Dat's er fac!" and Pomp grinned from ear to ear as he looked at the three enthusiastic swimmers.

"It's a pretty good joke," remarked Kensel, lighting his pipe.

"Yes—three suits of clothes would cost me about one hundred dollars," said Frank. "I've got to make this trip pay somehow."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Pomp.

Barney never could enjoy Pomp's laughing chuckle under such circumstances. It nettled him more than the sting of a hornet.

"Luk at the naygur!" he said. "Shure av I had his wool it's a shape I wud be!"

"Dat's er fac," chuckled Pomp. "Sheep ain't got no sense or spunk. Yer ain't got no wool, an' dat makes yer a fool, Barney."

Barney was about to rush at him, but Frank called to him:

"Behave yourself, Barney. You are acting like a fool! Pomp has the right to laugh at the whole pack of you, and so have I!"

"Dat's er fac," chuckled Pomp again.

"I own up to that," said Kensel, "but you will

see me get even with you before we get back to New York."

"Oh, that's all right. I'll wait till we get back to New York before I order the suits."

"Enough said!" exclaimed Sallinger. "I was afraid you were going to order them right now."

"I don't like the suits the sharks put up here, or I would," said Frank.

"They have put up three suits for you."

"Simply gave me orders on you fellows for them—that's all," replied Frank.

"Bad cess to 'em," said Barney.

"Jes' look at dem gulls!" said Pomp, pointing to a couple of huge rocks that loomed up about 200 feet out of the water a couple of miles out from the shore, where thousands of sea gulls and other fowls were swarming.

The rocks covered several acres and were themselves covered with gulls.

"They are nesting," said Frank.

"Let's go over and take a look at them," suggested Kensel.

"Yes, and lay in a stock of eggs," added Sallinger.

"All right," and Frank turned in that direction. In a few minutes the air-ship was in the midst of a million—more or less—sea fowls, and trying to find a resting place on the rock.

"What a sight!" exclaimed Kensel, as he gazed down at the rock. "There is not a square foot uncovered by the fowls."

"No," said Frank. "I don't see any chance for us to make a landing."

"Can't we drop down into the water so that we can ascend the rock on foot?"

"Yes, we can do that," and it was accordingly done.

The air-ship settled down on the water right under the rock, and then our heroes pulled around till they were able to spring ashore.

Frank remained on board in charge of the air-ship. Barney did not feel well enough to go up on the rock, so only Pomp, Kensel and Sallinger went up.

Each of them carried a basket about the size of a peck measure.

When they returned the baskets were full of eggs, and as many more had been stepped on and mashed.

"I want to get away from here as soon as we can," said Kensel, as he stepped on board.

"Why what's the matter?" Frank asked.

"Too much fowl and foul eggs," was the reply.

"I thought so," said Frank. "They never clean out their old nests, and so some of the eggs get too ripe."

As soon as they were all on board Frank began the ascent. The whirling of the rotascope set the gulls in a flutter, and a terrible commotion was the result.

There were so many of them, however, that no one on board had any desire to shoot them. There could not have been any sport in shooting into a flock of so many birds.

"Well, I am glad we don't have to camp on that island to-night," said Sallinger, looking back at the fowl-covered rock.

"So am I," added Kensel. "A half hour there was enough for me."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Dar's too many dar ter be healthy."

They sailed back to the main land and resumed the search along the coast for fresh water.

After passing beyond the bold bluffs they found a small stream emptying into the ocean through a rocky gateway.

"There's fresh water," said Frank, "though we may have to go up-stream some distance to find it free from salt."

"Not very far I guess," said Kensel. "It seems to me to be above the tide not a quarter of a mile back."

"I guess you are right. Why, hello! The entire stream is not a mile long."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, look out there—there's nothing but a dry plain beyond."

"That's so. I guess there's a big spring in that clump of woods."

"We'll soon find out," said Frank, and the air-ship sailed about over the woods till they found an opening in the trees through which they could make a descent to the ground.

On reaching the ground they found a big spring from which flowed a large creek. The water was cold and sweet.

"Why this is a curiosity," exclaimed Frank, as he tasted the water and glanced at the dimensions of the spring. "It must be like some of the big springs in Florida, where whole rivers disappear under ground and reappear somewhere else."

"Yes, I should say this is one of that kind," said Sallinger.

"Well, it's just the spot we were looking for,"

remarked Kensel. Plenty of wood and water—just the things we needed in camp."

"Yes, and I guess we can find something to eat about here."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Dar's er monkey up dar in dat tree."

"A monkey! Where?"

"Up dar in dat tree. De Lor'sabe us! Dat tree am full ob monkeys."

They all looked up and found one of the trees loaded with monkeys.

The little fellows on seeing they were discovered began scampering from limb to limb and chattering at a fearful rate.

"Well, this is something new," said Kensel. "I hadn't thought of seeing monkeys here. They are frisky little fellows."

"Yes," said Frank, "and the greatest little thieves in the world. Keep every door and window on board ship closed, Pomp."

"Yes, sah," replied Pomp.

"Are they so bad as that?"

"Yes. They'll run off with anything not too heavy for them to carry."

"Well, I am glad you told me that or I might have lost my hat, being in the habit of laying it aside whenever I get in the shade."

"You want to keep your hat on your head round here," said Frank. "You can't trust a monkey with anything he can get away with."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CRAB FISHING EXTRAORDINARY.

OUR heroes made a fire and began preparations for a camp. The sun was still some two or three hours high and shining very warm.

"Let's go down to the mouth of the creek and see what we can catch for supper," suggested Frank.

"That suits me," said Kensel.

"And me too," added Sallinger.

"Well, bring your guns and fishing tackle along. We don't know which we shall need the most, but will be prepared for anything that turns up."

They got their guns and fishing tackle and accompanied Frank down the stream on its short run to the sea.

The banks of the stream were well wooded, although the ground was so rocky that it was difficult to see where trees could get root hold. But they did, and many of them were quite large, with extremely luxuriant foliage.

As they advanced they found monkeys everywhere. The little fellows scampered out of the way as they saw our party.

"There's quite a colony of them here," said Kensel, "a fact which I am at a loss to understand."

"I don't think they live here all the time," said Frank, looking around at the chattering little fellows. "They have come here for some special reason for a time."

"What special reasons can they have? I don't see much fruit about, and surely they did not come here for the water alone."

"Suppose we watch some of them and see what they feed on while we are here!" suggested Kensel.

"Yes, that's the way to find out," said Sallinger, "but we are not naturalists on a monkey hunt."

"No—that's true. But we are not prohibited from learning anything while out on this survey, are we?"

"Gentlemen," said Frank, "the survey is practically ended. We have reached the Pacific Ocean. The railroad can't go any further. I propose to camp here two or three days."

"Why so long?" Kensel asked.

"I want to examine the electrical machinery of the air-ship, see that everything is in perfect order, oil every joint, and then clean up things generally."

"Ah, I see you have a huge bump of caution, Mr. Reade," said Sallinger, smiling.

"Yes, and you may well thank your lucky star that I have," said Frank. "All our lives depend on our watchfulness. If any part of the machinery should give way, we would not stay up in the air very long."

"That is self evident. I am willing to give my time to the work. You can order me around lively when you get to work."

"Well, I shall order you two to go fishing when I begin work, for I don't want any loafers around when I am busy."

"Good! I'll go fishing and stay all day," said Kensel, laughing heartily.

By this time they had reached the point where tide water came up to the ledge of rocks over which the waters of the creek rippled.

There were quite a number of monkeys about, and our heroes stopped in a clump of bushes to observe them.

Just below the ledge of rocks, seaweed grew quite abundantly. Rocky fissures were seen everywhere along the edge of the water, and extending back some distance.

Several monkeys were seen sitting over one of those crevices, looking very solemn and yet expectant.

Suddenly one of them gave a screech and sprang four or five feet in the air, amid a chattering of tongues.

On the end of his tail a huge crab was attached, which, the moment he landed on his feet again, the monkey smashed with a small stone which he picked up from the ground.

"By all the saints of Mexico!" exclaimed Frank. "They are fishing for crabs!"

"Fishing for crabs?"

"Yes. Didn't you see that fellow catch one? I have often heard of such fishing, but didn't believe it. Just look at those sitting over that crevice in the rock. Their tails hang down in the water. When a crab nips it they spring up, yank the crab out of the water, and smash him with a stone before he can escape."

"Great guns!" exclaimed Kensel, as another monkey made a horrible grimace and a spring, yanking a big crab out of his native element. "That beats anything I ever heard of in all my life. Those fellows ought to be civilized and given a vote. They know how to make a living, which cannot be said of every man in the world."

"Just see how he enjoys that crab!" said Sallinger.

"And see the other one examining the tip of his tail to see where the last catch nipped it! I tell you those monkeys have more real courage and fortitude than any of us. Hanged if I don't take off my hat to the little rascals."

"Look at that big fellow on the right there! He looks scared and seems to be on the verge of leaping."

"He's getting a bite—feels the crab smelling around. There he goes! By George, he has a big crab! Just see how quick he knocks him loose from his grip! Oh, it's no fun to them!"

"But it's fun to me," said Kensel, holding his sides with laughter. "I never saw anything like it in all my career."

Suddenly a little wee monkey, who was very nervous for some time, gave a screech and sprang up three or four feet with an immense old hard-shell crab fastened to the end of his tail.

He landed on his feet and rolled over and over in mortal agony. The crab held on like grim leath, and the little fellow was in too much pain to think about smashing him with a stone. He screeched at the top of his shrill voice, and tried to pull the crab off. In doing that the crab nipped his hand, and such acrobatic feats as that little monkey performed our heroes had never before witnessed.

Finally an old monkey killed the crab with a stone, and the little fellow was relieved of his nipping prize.

But the incident was too much for our heroes. They rolled over and over on the ground in convulsive laughter.

The monkeys were thus frightened away, and they scampered for the woods as fast as their nimble feet could carry them.

But our heroes laughed till they cried, and then tried to stop and sympathize with young monkey fishermen. But the more they tried to sympathize the more they laughed. They couldn't get over the ludicrousness of the affair.

"Well, that's the best circus I ever saw," said Kensel, wiping his eyes.

"I never saw anything that could beat it," said Sallinger, "and I know I have not had such a laugh in twenty years."

"Now let's try our luck at crab fishing," suggested Frank.

"We haven't any tails," said Sallinger.

"There is where the monkey has the advantage of us," put in Kensel. "I never appreciated the monkey so much as I do to-day."

They went over the rocks to the spot where the monkeys had been crabbing, and found the crabs quite thick among the crevices and in the shallow places.

"This must be a sort of feeding-ground for them," said Frank.

"They can't get above the ledge of rocks there," remarked Kensel, "and I guess that's why so many of them are here. Now, there's nothing in the water I relish more than the crab. How can we manage to get a bushel or two of them?"

"Catch 'em monkey fashion," suggested Sallinger, laughing.

"I'll give you one dollar each for all you catch that way," retorted Kensel.

"Oh, I'm not a monkey!"

"Well, I wouldn't deny my race after this if I was."

"Pomp can rig up a crab-net in a few minutes," said Frank, "and he is a good hand at catching them, too. Suppose you go back to the camp and tell him to fix up a net and come down here with it. He can get a bushel of 'em in a little while."

Kensel hastened back to the camp and told Pomp about the crabs.

Now, Pomp loved crabs equal to any monkey in Mexico. He went to work and made a net out of an old mosquito-bar, and then taking a piece of bear meat along, hastened down to the point where the others were waiting.

CHAPTER XXX.

POMP AND THE MONKEY.

ON reaching the spot Pomp tied a string to a piece of bear-meat, attached the string to a pole, and gave it to Kensel to hold over and drop into the water.

A dozen crabs fastened on to the piece of meat at once, while as many more fought to get at it.

Pomp used the scoop-net he had made to scoop 'em up, and caught over a dozen at the first haul.

"Golly, but dey am fat ones!" he exclaimed, as he placed them into the basket he had brought along with him.

"We'll have a supper fit for a king!" said Kensel, smacking his lips in anticipation of the feast. "I want just as many as I can eat, and I never did know just how many that would be."

"You can find out to-night, I guess," remarked Frank.

"Yes—and as these are very large ones, I don't think I'll require over a thousand of them."

Pomp scooped them up by the dozens, and in a little while his basket was filled.

"Dese am enough," he said, as he looked at the clawing, wriggling mass in the basket. "Ef dat water is hot enough dey will soon be red an' ready ter eat. Yum, yum, yum!"

"Stop that yum, yum, yum, Pomp!" cried Kensel, "or I'll go to eating 'em alive."

"Reckon you wouldn't eat many, den," replied Pomp, grinning, "casse dey am mad an' full ob fight."

"Do they fight each other?"

"Yes, sah, dey does. Jes' look at dem," and he held up a pair of old fellows that were clawing each other up.

"Drop 'em in hot water as soon as you can. I am hungry for them."

When they reached the camp-fire they found the kettle of water boiling with tremendous energy. It would not hold but a dozen at a time.

The first dozen was dropped in, and in a minute or two they began to change color.

As fast as they were well cooked they were taken out and others put in. By that means they were all cooked in the course of an hour.

Then the feast commenced.

The rich fragrance of the freshly-cooked crabs was a little too much for the monkeys.

They came around by hundreds, chattering and screeching as if half crazy to get hold of cooked crabs.

"Throw 'em one, Pomp," suggested Frank, and a big fat one was thrown at the foot of one of the trees.

Instantly there was a scrambling among the little ones that set our heroes in a roar.

About a dozen reached it at the same moment, and then a savage fight resulted.

They fought with the savage ferocity of tigers, and a number ran up the tree crying with pain from hurts they had received.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "Ise gwine for ter catch one fo' my ole 'oman," and he started toward the wriggling pile of monkeys.

"Better look out, Pomp," called Frank.

But Pomp wanted a monkey and he paid no heed to the warning.

Selecting a plump little fellow who was doing his best to take the coat off the back of another one, he grabbed him by the back of the neck and came away with him.

The monkey was at a loss to know what had happened to him for some moments. Then he seemed to realize that something bigger and different from a monkey had him.

He squirmed and scratched and tried to bite, but Pomp was too much for him at first.

Then he let out a series of screeches that caused every monkey in the woods to stop and think.

There was a profound silence for a moment or two, and then bedlam broke loose.

A thousand little rascals screeched at once and appeared to be worked up to a pitch of rage that made lunatics of them.

They sprang from branch to branch of the

trees, screeching like all possessed, breaking off twigs and throwing them at Pomp.

"Let him go, Pomp," said Frank. "He'll give you no end of trouble. It would be cheaper to buy a tame one."

"Dat's er fac!" said Pomp, and just as he was going to release the little rascal the whole gang began screeching on a higher key.

That seemed to nerve the prisoner to renewed exertion. He caught Pomp's arm with his two hind feet and tried to get his tail around his neck.

Pomp saw the move and tried to throw the monkey from him, but the little fellow began fighting with a terrible energy, and succeeded in biting his arm.

"Ough—ugh!" yelled Pomp. "Pull 'im off, Marso Frank!"

Frank ran forward, caught the monkey by the tail, jerked him loose and slung him out into the middle of the creek.

"Befor' de Lor'!" said Pomp, ruefully, rubbing his arm. "I doan want no mo' monkey."

"Got enough, eh?"

"Yes, sah, I is."

"Well, I told you to look out."

"Yes, sah; but er nigger ain't got no sense," replied Pomp.

"Bedad, but it's er fac!" exclaimed Barney.

Pomp's eyes flashed.

"Er nigger knows er 'gater when he sees 'im, which er Irisher doan't," he retorted.

"Come, now—none of that," said Frank, as he saw that in less than a minute they would exchange blows.

The little monkey swam out to the other side of the creek, and the whole tribe ran off up the trees and made their way round the spring to where the late prisoner was.

They seemed to hold a convention, as they remained in a body for a long time, chattering like politicians at a primary.

Then they scampered off into the woods, and were silent for nearly an hour.

But they came back, by and by, drawn by the delicious odors of the boiled crabs. They leaped about on the trees and abused our heroes for not passing the crabs around.

But they got nothing but shells, and night came on without then having obtained the treat they had begged so hard for.

During the night, while our heroes slept, the monkeys came down and roamed at leisure over the camp—even leaping all over the the air-ship and trying to get inside.

It was annoying for a time, but by degrees our heroes got used to it and fell asleep.

When they awoke in the morning they found the monkeys gone—not one being in sight.

But they were found soon after dawn at the ledge of rocks fishing for crabs, and there our heroes repaired after breakfast to take in the fun.

While they were engaged in watching the monkeys they were destined to receive a surprise they little expected or relished.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO WONDERFUL SHOTS.

WHILE our heroes were engaged watching the monkey system of crabbing another watcher was discovered in the form of a huge serpent.

Kensel was the first to see him.

He saw his head protruding from behind a rock almost in striking distance of the monkeys.

That was all he did see—but from the size of the head he rightly judged that he was a big fellow.

"By George!" Kensel exclaimed, in an undertone, "I see a big snake!"

"Where?" asked Sallinger.

"I can only see his head just over that boulder a little to the right of that monkey at the end of that row at the crevice."

"Ah! I see him! Let me put a bullet through his head," and Sallinger raised his rifle to fire.

"Hold on—don't shoot yet," said Kensel, laying a hand on his arm. "Let's wait and see what his game is."

"Why his game is to catch a monkey for his breakfast, of course."

"Maybe it is, but let's see him do it. We have never seen such a thing and never will again."

"You are right, but it's a pity to let him catch one of those ingenious little fellows."

"Oh, the monkeys are used to it. I've no doubt that snake has been coming here regularly for years for his supply of monkeys."

"Well, we'll wait and see how he works his racket."

They waited nearly an hour, during which time the snake came round under the further side of the rock and crept slowly toward the doomed monkey on the end of the row.

The little fellow sat there with his tail hanging

down into the water patiently waiting for a bite.

But he was thinking of crabs—not snakes—and expecting every moment to feel the nip at the end of his caudal appendage.

The serpent crept nearer and nearer assilient as death itself, and when in striking distance reached for his prize. He caught the doomed monkey squarely by the back, and lifted him several feet above the rock.

His screech alarmed all the other monkeys, and in another moment they became aware of the presence of their enemy.

They knew him of old, and set up the most excruciating screeches our heroes had ever heard, scampering about in a way that fully betrayed their terror and demoralization.

The serpent proceeded to crush all the bones of his victim, and then swallow him.

The process of swallowing was rather faster than our heroes expected to see, as they had read of many instances where the serpent spent hours at dinner.

But the monkey was rather small, and in five minutes after he began swallowing the morsel the dinner was over.

As the monkeys had all retreated to a safe distance, the snake made no further efforts to catch another. He probably knew from past experience that it would be useless to do so.

He stretched himself at full length out on the rocks in the hot sun to sleep after his meal, and wait for digestion.

"Now is our time to avenge the monkeys," said Kense, rising from his crouching position.

"Yes," returned Sallinger, "we owe it to them to kill him."

"So we do. Can you hit his head at this distance?"

"Of course I can. I am a good shot."

"So am I. Aim at his head and fire at the word three—one, two, three—crack!"

Both shots were as one report, and when they looked through the smoke they saw the monster serpent executing some of the most vigorous squirming they had ever seen in all their lives.

He rolled himself into spiral coils like an immense cork-screw, and then shot out straight again like a flash of lightning.

"We did for him that time!" cried Kense.

"Yes, his neck is broken! See how his head hangs when he raises himself! Isn't he a monster?"

"Yes, an awful ugly fellow. Let's run over there and have a closer view of him."

They ran around on the rocks till they were in ten paces of the squirming monster. There they sat down on a rock and watched him struggling against fate.

It was nearly an hour ere our heroes made up their minds that the serpent was dead, and then they made a minute examination of the dead monster.

They shuddered as they did so.

"He must have had enormous strength," remarked Kense.

"Yes. They have strength enough to master any animal they attack. Just look at those fangs. They are nearly two inches long."

"Yes, but they are not poisonous, I'm told."

"No, the anaconda, boa-constrictor and python, the three largest serpents in the world, are all non-poisonous. The most venomous snakes are generally small."

"The cobra, in India, and the asp, of Egypt, are small, seldom attaining a length of three feet."

"I am teetotally down on all snakes, poisonous or otherwise."

"So am I. Shall we go back to camp and tell Reade what we have done, or wait till noon?"

"I guess we had better wait till noon, as he is busy overhauling the air-ship."

"Then we had better go further down toward the beach and give the monkeys a chance to come back and catch more crabs."

"Yes. We may come across game of some kind down there."

They shouldered their rifles and set off down the stream toward the beach, which was not a half mile away. There was not a tree below the ledge of rocks, but wherever the weeds could get a grip they grew very abundantly.

Various kinds of aquatic fowl rose on the wing as our heroes advanced.

"If we had shot-guns we could take 'em on the wing," said Kense, looking wistfully up at a number of fowls flying over him.

"Oh, give 'em bullets," suggested Sallinger.

"On the wing?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"I am not such a fool as to think I can kill birds on the wing with a rifle."

"Why won't a bullet kill a bird on the wing as readily as when sitting?"

"It will, if it hits him. That's where the trouble is—hitting him."

"Oh, there's no trouble in that. Just watch me bring down that gull now," and Sallinger raised his rifle and aimed at a gull which was sailing leisurely along several hundred feet overhead.

He fired. The bird closed its wings and dropped to the earth like a stone.

"Great Scott!" gasped Kense. "Did you do that on purpose?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you see me shoot at him?"

"Yes," and Kense took up the dead bird and looked at it. It was shot right through the body.

Sallinger was as much astonished at the shot as Kense was, but did not let him know it.

"Sallinger, you are a fraud," said Kense, dropping the dead bird. "It was an accident. You couldn't do that again in one hundred shots."

Sallinger laughed.

"Don't you gamble on that, Kense," he said.

"Oh, yes I will. Here's ten dollars against one that you can't do that again."

Sallinger knew it was an accident, but he was not the man to be bantered that way. He very quietly drew out a dollar coin, laid it on the ground, saying:

"There you are. Cover it."

Kense promptly laid down the bill, and then Sallinger saw another gull flying over him. He took a quick aim and fired.

Down came the gull, almost falling on Kense's head.

"I guess I'll take that ten dollars," said Sallinger, smiling.

"Yes, take it," replied Kense. "You are either a crack shot or else the luckiest fellow in the world."

"Oh, I am both."

"I believe you. But look here. I'll bet you one hundred dollars against ten dollars that you can't do it again."

"Oh, come off now! Why won't two shots satisfy you?" and Sallinger laughed.

"Put up or shut up," replied Kense.

"I'll bet that you can't do it," said Sallinger.

"So will I. I don't pretend to be a crack shot."

"Did you ever hear me claim that I was?"

"No, and that is why I am surprised at your shots. Are you a crack shot?"

"Haven't you seen enough to satisfy you on that point?"

"Hardly. One more shot would settle it forever and against the world."

Sallinger laughed as he pocketed the money, and said:

"Not to-day—some other day."

They wended their way down toward the mouth of the creek, keeping quite close to the water.

Suddenly Kense espied a huge alligator lying on the bank on the opposite side.

"Look there!" he exclaimed, pointing to the scaly monster. "Let's give him some lead."

"Yes—under the fore arm—quick!"

The monster heard them and was on the eve of plunging into the water.

Our heroes aimed quickly and fired promptly, giving the alligator two bullets under the right fore leg.

He bellowed like a bull and plunged into the water, diving out of sight.

"Too bad," said Kense, "that he should get away, and we so near him, too."

"I am not sure that he has gotten away," replied Sallinger. "I am confident that he got both bullets."

"Maybe he did, but he took them to the bottom with him."

"But he will come out to die."

"How do you know that?"

"I had a friend who use to shoot them in Florida every year. He told me that if an alligator found out he had to die he always crawled up out of the water to do so."

Just then they heard a commotion in the water. The alligator was lashing it into foam with his tail. He raised his head out of the water and bellowed.

"You see he is hard hit," said Sallinger.

"Yes, but I don't see him coming ashore," was the reply.

"They are hard to kill. Give him time and he will come out. I don't believe my friend lied to me about it."

The scaly monster plunged about in the water in a furious rage for nearly a half hour, lashing it into a sea of foam.

Then they saw that he was weakening very fast, and that he was making for the shore where they were standing.

"He is coming out here," said Kense. "Let's get back and give him all the room he wants."

They moved back away from the water and watched the monster from a safe distance.

He crawled up on the banks of the creek and squirmed about, apparently in great agony, for nearly an hour. He roared, or bellowed, like a bull at times, and lashed his tail furiously.

"He is caving in," said Kense.

"Yes, my friend was right."

"So he was. It's a strange thing for them to do when the water is their natural element. There, I believe he is giving his last kick now!"

"Yes; look at that!"

The monster raised his tail and held it up quivering for a minute or two, and then dropped it heavily to the ground. He was dead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRANK REPAIRS THE AIR-SHIP AND THEN DECIDES TO EXTEND THE TRIP DOWN THE PACIFIC COAST.

OUR two heroes were overjoyed at their success in killing the alligator. It was the first of the kind they had ever killed by themselves, hence they felt disposed to congratulate each other on the feat.

"We have done well," said Kense.

"Splendid," returned Sallinger. "A monster serpent and a huge alligator, and yet the day is not half gone."

"Shall we go back to camp for dinner, or—"

"Oh, we may as well go back for dinner. I don't believe in hunting on an empty stomach."

"Nor do I," and Kense consulted his watch.

"It is but 11 o'clock. We may see another alligator before 12. Shall we look around further?"

"Yes. I am just getting my hand in," replied Sallinger. "I'd like to see an elephant or rhinoceros come along now."

"Well, I wouldn't," said Kense.

"You wouldn't?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't care to tackle 'em," was the candid reply.

"Afraid, eh?"

"Yes, and so are you."

Sallinger laughed.

He knew that Kense had told the truth, but liked to blow too well to say so.

They moved down the creek till they reached the ocean, and then looked around for game of any kind.

But no game was there.

"Let's go back," said Kense. "There's nothing down here for us."

"All right. Come on," and they both turned and made their way back over the ground they had just crossed.

They found the dead alligator where they had left him, only there were about a million big green flies swarming around it.

"Did you ever so many flies?" exclaimed Kense.

"I never did," replied the other. "Do you notice the strong musk scent that fills the air?"

"Yes, where does it come from?"

"The alligator."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. I have often heard my friend speak of it as being very strong when they were engaged in skinning the alligators."

"I guess that's where it comes from, then."

"No doubt of it."

They made their way up to the monkey's crabbing ground and found that the little fellows would not come back as long as the dead serpent lay there in plain view.

"That's too bad," said Sallinger. "We ought to throw the snake into the water and let the 'gators get it."

"Yes, but we want Reade and the other two to see it before we do that. They might think we were blowing, you know."

"That's so. Well, come along," and they wended their way back to camp, where Frank looked hard at them, as if surprised about something.

"Where's your game?" he asked.

"We let it down below there," replied Kense.

"Well, all I have to say is that you two are very poor foragers for a camp. I was sure you would at least bring in something for dinner."

"Dinner! Why, you don't want any snake for dinner, do you?" Kense asked.

"Well, hardly. I am not hungry enough for that. Did you kill any snakes?"

"We killed one, and he was a whopper, too," and Sallinger sat down on a stone and began fanning himself with his hat.

"What else did you kill?"

"Two sea-gulls," said Kense.

Frank turned up his nose.

"You make me tired," he said.

"Dats er fac," added Pomp.

"And an enormous alligator," put in Sallinger.

"But what did you get for dinner?" Frank asked, with a look of extreme disgust on his bronzed face.

"Nothing," said Kensel. "We never saw any game that we were willing to eat."

"All right, then. Suppose you try your luck at fishing. By the time you catch a mess of fish for dinner we will have this job ended. Then we will have a hunt that will be a hunt."

They took their fishing-tackle and went back down to the ledge of rocks to try their luck at fishing.

But the crabs were so numerous there that the fish had no chance at the hooks at all, and so they did not catch any there.

At the end of a half hour they returned with nothing but their tackle.

"Where's our dinner?" Frank asked.

"In the ocean, I guess," replied Kensel.

"Didn't catch anything?"

"Nothing—not even a whale."

"Well, you fellows take the cake. Let me have your tackle a moment."

He took Sallinger's tackle, bated the hook and went to the creek not five paces from the camp-fire, cast it in and in less than two minutes drew out a four pound trout.

"Well, shoot me for a fool," exclaimed Kensel, "if I didn't think that no fish could come up here over that ledge of rocks!"

"Just what I thought, too," added Sallinger.

"How did they do it?"

"A trout can climb where a crab cannot," said Frank. "Here, Pomp, put this fish in the pan just as quick as you can."

"Yes, sah," said Pomp, taking the fish and killing it instantly.

Before he had divested the first fish of his scales Frank had another one a pound or so heavier.

"I guess that will be enough," he said.

"Have you fellows learned anything yet?"

"Yes," replied Sallinger.

"What is it?"

"That you can catch smoked herring in a volcano," was the reply.

Frank and Kensel roared.

"Perhaps I could if a Dutchman had a small grocery there," returned Frank.

Pomp soon had the dinner ready, and our heroes sat down to enjoy it with appetites that would have utterly demoralized a New York boarding-house keeper.

"Instead of going out hunting this afternoon," said Frank, turning to Sallinger, "you had better stay on board and make out the report of the survey to be sent back to New York."

"The report is very nearly finished. I have been making it out as we came along, and I was particular to draw a red line across the map of Mexico as we progressed."

"Very good. I think we ought to make it out and send it back as soon as possible."

"Can we send it back faster than we could take it?" Kensel asked.

"Yes," answered Frank, "for I am not going back to New York direct."

"Where are you going?" they both asked.

"I don't know. I do not care to go back till I have seen some of the world."

Kensel roared.

"See some of the world! What part of the known world have you not seen?"

"There's many a corner I have not seen yet," replied Frank, "and now while I am down here in this part of the world, I want to see some of it."

"Where do you wish to go?" Kensel asked.

"I would like to go down the Pacific coast to the jumping off place. What say you fellows to that?"

Kensel and Sallinger looked at each other, as if one was waiting for the other to speak first.

"I am willing," said Kensel, "if it does not cost too much."

"Oh, it shall not cost you a cent," said Frank. "You two shall go as my guests if you go at all. My contract with the railroad syndicate ends with the completion of the survey of the route."

"That's so—I accept your invitation," said Kensel.

"What say you, Sallinger?"

"I accept, too," was the reply. "But where can I mail my report?"

"Oh, we can sail over to some responsible post-office and mail it. Or, we might sail out over the ocean to some ship bound for San Francisco, and get the captain to mail it there for you."

"That would be a novelty indeed."

"Yes, I would like to do that."

"We'll start to-morrow, then, if you can finish your report by that time."

"I'll finish it if I have to write on it all night," said Sallinger.

"You had better get to work at it right away,

then. Kensel and I will go out and try our luck at getting a good supper for you. Barney and Pomp will remain to guard the ship and keep the monkeys and snakes from interfering with you."

Sallinger finished his cigar and went to work to get his report in good shape to be sent back to the syndicate of capitalists in New York.

Frank and Kensel took their rifles and went out to make an afternoon of it, leaving Sallinger alone with his big task.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AIR-SHIP AND THE SHIP AT SEA.

WHEN Frank and Kensel returned to camp, a little before sunset, they found that Sallinger had completed his report, and that Barney and Pomp had caught several large trout for supper.

They had succeeded in killing nothing that was fit for food, and so had to depend on the fish for supper, as they did for the noon-day meal.

They spent the evening till bed-time telling stories, and then retired to sleep and dream of the extensive trip they were about to take.

They were up bright and early the next morning, and after a breakfast on fish, bread, coffee and butter, they prepared to leave the spot.

The sun was about an hour high when the air-ship ascended.

"I see a ship," cried Kensel when they were up about a quarter of a mile.

"She is twenty miles away, too," said Frank, looking at the ship in the distance. "But she is the ship we want, as she is heading northward."

"Well, let's go out there and give the skipper and crew a good scare," suggested Kensel.

"Just what I was thinking of," said Frank.

The air-ship turned in that direction, and in a few minutes it was sailing above the blue waters of the Pacific.

The ship was a long way out, and it took our heroes nearly two hours to reach it.

But long before they were in hailing distance, it was plainly seen that the crew of the ship were intensely excited over the appearance of the air-ship.

The captain of the ship stood by with trumpet and glass.

"What ship is that?" Frank asked.

"The Sea Gull of San Francisco, homeward bound," replied the captain. "What craft is that?"

"The Flying Dutchman," replied Frank.

A yell of terror escaped the crew, and every mother's son of them made a break for the cabin, to hide themselves from the terror of the superstitious sailor of almost every nation in the world.

The captain was silent for several minutes, looking first up at the air-ship and then around at his own deserted deck.

Even the man at the wheel had deserted his post, so the captain had to hasten to that part at once in order to keep the ship on its course.

"What's the matter with your crew, captain?" Frank asked.

"They have turned fools all of a sudden," he replied.

"Well, they needn't be afraid. This is only Frank Reade's air-ship out on a cruise."

"Here, men, back to your posts," cried the captain. "It is only Frank Reade and his air-ship which you have all heard of."

The sailors had indeed heard of him for years, and they came out to get a look at the air-ship and the young man whose fame had filled the scientific world for several years.

They looked up at the air-ship and cheered the young inventor at the top of their lungs.

"Captain," said Reade, "we came to ask you to mail some letters for us in San Francisco. They are very important. Will you do us that favor?"

"With all my heart," said the captain. "Come down with your letters."

"They are in the box which we will drop on your deck."

The box was dropped and the captain took charge of it.

"We may meet again, captain, and then I hope we may have a chance to get better acquainted."

"Yes," replied the captain. "I would like very much to meet you again, Mr. Reade. Where are you bound now?"

"We are going down the Pacific coast of Central and South America. We have come across from the Rio Grande."

"How does your ship work?"

"As easy as a baby's cradle," replied Frank.

After a few words more our heroes bade adieu to the captain and his crew and started down the coast, leaning toward the shore as they moved southward.

"That business is off our hands," remarked

Sallinger, "and now we can devote ourselves to pleasurable enjoyment."

"Yes," said Kensel, "and follow our own sweet wills, too."

"We shall have enough to do to follow the coast," put in Frank.

"Is there any difficulty about doing that?" Kensel asked.

"That depends whether or not a storm should blow us up or down the coast, or out to sea."

"Is there any likelihood of such a thing occurring?"

"Always in this latitude."

"Then I suggest that we get out of this latitude just as quick as we can."

"I second that suggestion," said Sallinger. "I don't want to have anything to do with cyclones, hurricanes or tornadoes. I never did like them, even when a boy, and I have less liking for them now in my old age."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp. "I dean want no slycones roun' me."

"Begorra, but it's no wan as wants 'em," put in Barney.

"Of course not. We are all agreed on that one point. But how about yellow fever down in Panama, Reade?"

"Oh, they have got it there, I believe."

"Well, I guess we had better give it a wide berth, then."

"Yes, or a pretty high berth. If we keep pretty well up in the pure air we won't be in much danger of catching it."

"Of course not. But it will take us some time to reach there yet."

"Yes, we have plenty of time. Just look at that village out there. Did you ever see a more poverty-stricken looking place anywhere?"

"I don't think I ever did. It must be a village of fishermen."

"Hardly. There's no market for fish in this part of the world."

"They fish for the home market, I guess. Just look at them! The whole town has turned out to look at us!"

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, "an' dey am skeerd almos' ter death!"

"Sure, an' it's woid they are," remarked Barney, as he saw the men, women and children running wildly about the street.

The air-ship did not stop there, however. Our heroes concluded to keep on their way till night forced them to seek a suitable camping place.

As they moved farther south the scenery on the landscape grew more interesting.

Mountains were seen in the distance rearing their peaks above the snow line; and here and there could be seen villages and towns nestling under the dense green foliage of tropical trees.

It was a scene worthy the brush of the true artist—one probably never seen from such a height before.

"There is one thing more I want to see," said Kensel, as he gazed at the snow-capped mountains in the distance.

"What is that?" Frank asked.

"I want to look down the throat of a wide-awake volcano."

"You are very modest, surely," replied Frank, laughing. "Why not ask to get a peep at Pluto's regions at once?"

"Oh, he'll get there in time," remarked Sallinger, with a broad grin on his face.

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp, at which there was a roar of laughter.

"You want to let the wide-awake volcanoes alone," said Frank, when he had finished his laugh, "and confine your explorations to the sleeping ones."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, with no small degree of emphasis.

Two hours later they came in sight of a volcano, from which a huge column of smoke was issuing.

"There's one now," said Frank. "We'll take it in and see what it looks like," and the course of the air-ship was changed. They made straight for the volcano in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OVER A WIDE AWAKE VOLCANO.

THE volcano was many miles back from the coast, yet so immense was the mountain range that it did not appear to be more than ten or fifteen miles off when our heroes started toward it.

But after an hour's sailing Kensel turned and asked:

"How far off is that mountain, anyway? We don't seem to be going very fast."

"We are making fifteen miles an hour," answered Frank. "I think we may reach it in two hours more."

"You don't mean to say that it is thirty miles off?"

"Yes, I do—at least, that is my estimate," said Frank.

"Jerusalem! I was never so deceived about anything before in all my life."

"How far off did you think it was?"

"About ten or twelve miles."

"Well, you were away off," said Frank, laughing. "A high mountain can be seen a long distance."

"Yes; I ought to have known that, for I've been among mountains a good deal in my day. But we are gaining on it. It begins to loom up higher every minute."

They passed over a number of small towns in the beautiful valleys, where the people ran out into the streets to gaze up at them.

As they approached the volcano the country became more rugged and mountainous. The settlements grew gradually smaller and further apart, until they ceased altogether.

Then the wild grandeur of the mountain scenery began to loom up. In many places bright silvery streams glittered in the sun's rays as they leaped down the mountain side, coming from the melting snow above.

"That water is cold and sweet," said Frank. "It comes from right under the snow. It is the best drinking water in the world."

"Snow water is the healthiest in the world, too."

"Yes. It is the best of all water to drink."

"Better than fire-water, eh?"

"Yes, indeed."

"It am mighty good ter mix wid fire-water," said Pomp.

"Sure an' it's roight yez are, Pomp," affirmed Barney.

"I quite agree with you both," said Kensel, laughing, "and so would the judge on the bench."

"And the prisoner at the bar," added Sallinger, "and all the officers of the court."

"Dat's er fac'," remarked Pomp, which nobody disputed.

"We are getting lower," said Kensel, looking over the side of the air-ship at the earth below.

"On the contrary, we are much higher than when we left the water," returned Frank. "The mountain comes up to meet us. That makes a big difference. We shall have to ascend much higher ere we scale the top of that volcano. It is many thousand feet above sea level."

"I notice that the volcano has but little snow on it," said Kensel.

"Yes, and it's a wonder it has any at all, considering the everlasting fires that burn within it," returned Frank.

"Yes, that's so."

The air-ship rose higher and higher and the air grew cooler till our heroes shivered.

"This is rather cool for summer," remarked Sallinger.

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, shivering as if he had a chill.

"How would you like to have a summer residence as high up as that peak out there where the snow has held its own since the first snow that fell?" Frank asked, as he pointed to an immense snow-capped peak on the left.

"Not so high up, if you please," returned Kensel, reaching for his overcoat. "I like cool places in summer, but not a frozen region."

"How would you like to go coasting there, Sallinger?"

"Nixey. I was very fond of coasting when I was a boy, but I didn't care to climb half way to the moon to get a good slide. I am very modest in my desires."

They were now near enough to the smoking volcano to realize something of its enormous extent. Several dense columns of smoke issued from the crater, accompanied by rumbling sounds not unlike distant thunder.

"It is not very wide awake now," remarked Frank, as he gazed at the crater.

"It isn't? What do you call wide awake, then?" Kensel asked.

"I call a volcano wide awake when it boils over and sends rivers of lava down its sides, destroying everything destructable in leagues around."

"Oh, yes, I should say so. Well, don't go too near this fellow for fear we might wake him up. I hear him grumbling now."

"Oh, I don't think we can wake him up. He'll get his nap out, no matter who comes along. I want to get a look down his throat and see if I can see anything of some who have gone before us."

"De lor' gorrnamity, Marse Frank!" exclaimed Pomp, "what's youse sayin' anyhow?"

"Never mind, Pomp," replied Frank. "You may give 'em the slip, you know. A nigger is mighty hard to hold."

"Begorra, but ave ould Nick gits 'im, sure he'll howld 'im," remarked Barney.

"What he do wid Irishers, Barney?" Pomp asked.

"Shure an' they don't be afther going there, ye naygur," replied Barney.

"Dat's all yer know 'bout it," sneered Pomp. "Dar's so many Irishers dar dat dey hab ter split 'em up fo' kindlin' wood."

"An' phat do they do wid the naygurs?" Barney asked.

"Make 'em split up de Irishers," was the prompt reply.

The others roared with merriment, and Barney had the good sense to join in the laugh.

By this time the air-ship was up on a level with the crater of the volcano, though a quarter of a mile from it.

In a few minutes they had reached the crater. It was an immense basin, an eighth of a mile in diameter, and probably a thousand feet deep.

The air-ship passed over the edge and sailed directly above the yawning chasm.

It was an awful spectacle.

Away down in the depths could be seen red flames blowing upward like a blaze at a blacksmith's forge, accompanied by rumbling signs and upheavals of great banks of ashes.

"Just imagine this whole basin boiling over with lava and pouring down the sides of the mountain, whilst red-hot stones, weighing sometimes a ton, are hurled a thousand feet in the air, amid clouds of smoke and flame, and you can have a faint idea of what a wide awake volcano is."

That was the picture Frank drew of a volcano in full blast.

"Did you ever see one?" Kensel asked.

"Yes, but I kept a good distance from it," was the reply.

"I feel the heat from below," remarked Sallinger.

"Of course you do. Would you like to drop down there and see just how hot it is?"

"No. I have no such curiosity. In fact, I am more anxious to see whether there is any snow on the other side over there."

Frank laughed.

They were now over the center of the yawning chasm, and the heat was very great.

Suddenly a tremendous upheaval below was heard, and an immense cloud of ashes and smoke rolled upward.

Hundreds of stones were hurled way above the air-ship, some of them but narrowly missing it.

One of them dropped back into the air-ship, and instantly the smell of burning wood told that it was red-hot.

"Throw it out, quick!" cried Frank.

Kensel quickly seized it and cast it overboard, performing the task so quickly that his fingers were but little scorched.

By this time the immense cloud of ashes and smoke had ascended to the air-ship.

The air was suffocating.

"De Lor' sabs us!" cried Pomp.

"The Howly Virgin pectus us!" gasped Barney, turning pale as a sheet.

"For God's sake, get us out 'of this!" cried Kensel, gasping for breath.

Frank was annoyed beyond measure, and not a little uneasy.

He had not expected such an upheaval, and was taken unawares.

But he put on the full power of the electric battery, and sent the air-ship speeding through the smoke at a fearful rate.

When they reached the clear air again, all, save Frank, were down on the deck gasping for breath. Everything was covered with fine gray ashes.

"We are all right now," cried Frank.

"By my soul!" gasped Sallinger, "that was a taste of 'Sheol.' I'll be a better man after this."

"So will I," said Barney, crossing himself devoutly.

"De Lor' sabs us!" groaned Pomp, rubbing his eyes to get the ashes out of them.

"It was a pretty tough place," said Frank. "I would not make that little trip across there again for a million dollars. You don't know what a narrow escape we made."

"It was too narrow to have any margin," said Kensel. "I don't want any more of it."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

"If one of those big stones had struck the bottom of the air-ship," said Frank, "it would have upset the battery and dropped us down into the crater. The world would never have known our fate."

"No more volcanoes for me," said Kensel.

"Nor me, nudder!" exclaimed Pomp. "Niggers ain't got no business flying ober dem places, nohow."

CHAPTER XXXV.

BARNEY TRIES HIS HAND AT SHOOTING PHEASANTS.

It took our heroes some time to get the smoke and ashes out of their eyes, ears, hair and clothes.

"Better git away from heah, Marse Frank," said Pomp, as another loud roar came from the angry volcano behind them.

"Yes, just git up and git," said Sallinger. "I am no hog—I've got enough."

"We are getting away as fast as we can," replied Frank. "Let her bellow. She can't do us any harm now. We are going round and back to the sea."

In a little while the air-ship was several miles from the crater and going rapidly toward the sea.

The sun was now low down, and in a little while it would sink below the waters of the Pacific. Yet the coast was some twenty miles distant.

"I think we would fare better down here by this stream below us," said Frank, "than out there by the sea."

"But suppose the volcano should wake up through the night and boil over," asked Kensel.

"Let her boil," said Frank. "We are fifteen or twenty miles away."

"So far as that?"

"Yes, every mile of it."

"It doesn't appear so."

"Of course not, yet we have been coming this way over an hour at full speed."

"That's so," said Sallinger. "Let her boil and be hanged to her."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

It was finally agreed that they would go about five miles further and then drop down on the banks of the mountain stream and encamp there for the night.

After going about four miles they found a beautiful little valley through which the stream ran—now quite a large creek—and where the foliage was green and abundant.

The air-ship settled down on the bank of the stream in the heart of a rich little valley.

A flock of pheasants flew up as the air-ship settled down.

"Be the powers!" cried Barney, seizing a gun and going in pursuit of the flocks, "thim's me birruds!"

He soon got a shot at them and succeeded in bringing down two.

"Faith, it's a faine shot I am," he said, congratulating himself on his good luck. "Ave I get two more ave the same it's a faine supper we'll have."

He picked up the two pheasants, saw that they were fat and young, and started back to the air-ship.

But the shot had started every pheasant in the valley, and they were up by thousands on every side. A great flock swept across the open just above his head. Barney blazed away with the other barrel, and nine birds came showering down upon him. One struck him on the head and mashed his hat down over his eyes.

"Be the powers!" he exclaimed, as he dropped the gun and lifted the hat off his head, "it niver rains but it pours. Bedad, but it's birruds we'll ate for supper."

He had to chase two of the birds whose wings only were hurt, and after catching them he gathered up the others and made his way back to the camp.

Pomp had started a fire and Sallinger had bathed his face in the creek when Barney came up with the half score of pheasants.

"Phat's them?" he asked, as he threw them on the ground before the party.

"Why, they are pheasants," said Frank, "and fine ones, too. How many did you get?"

"Eliven," he answered, proudly.

"Why, I never heard but two shots."

"Sure, and wud ye have me shoot one at a toime?"

"Eleven pheasants at two shots!" exclaimed Kensel. "You'll have to look out for your laurels, Sallinger. That lays away over you."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, and Barney stalked about as if he were the crack shot of the party.

"Sure an' it's roight yez are, Pomp," said Barney. "Whin I goes out the game comes in."

Pomp soon had the feathers off the birds, and five of them were placed on the coals to broil.

It was a fine supper under the circumstances, and our heroes had good appetites.

"There are six more for breakfast," said Kensel, as he finished his bird. "I don't think I would kick against pheasant three times a day for a week."

"There's where you are away off," replied Frank.

"How so?"

"Because wild pheasant is like quail in regard to a regular diet. Before the week was out you'd prefer buzzard or crow to pheasant."

"Well, now, maybe I would, but I am free to say that I don't think so."

"You have never tried it?"

"No, but I would like to."

"I should like to see you do it. You have never tried quail that way, either, have you?"

"No. I have heard of men trying to eat thirty quails in thirty days and failed. But I have always believed that I could eat sixty in sixty days."

"Don't you ever gamble on that, old fellow," said Frank. "I have seen men with strong stomachs try it and fail. You would cave in before you passed the tenth bird."

"I don't believe it," said Kensel again.

"Nor do I," put in Sallinger. "I can eat quail on toast 365 days in the year and still cry for more."

Frank smiled, Pomp grinned and Barney chuckled.

"Hanged if I don't give you a trial when we get back home," Frank said. "You fellows have much to learn yet, and you are both older than I am."

They all laughed, and Kensel said:

"I may be wrong, but I am willing to try it, anyhow."

They filled their pipes and sat down for a sociable smoke. The evening air was balmy and soft, and the stars seemed to shine brighter than ever before.

"I wonder if there are any fish in that stream," said Kensel.

"I doubt it," said Frank. "It is almost like ice water."

"I shall try in the morning," put in Sallinger. "I am inclined to think that fish like cold water as well as we do."

At a late hour they retired to the air-ship to sleep, and the entire party slept till sunrise without once waking.

"I don't think I ever slept so sweetly in my life," said Frank, as he arose from his berth.

"Nor I," added Kensel. "I slept like an infant all night. The air is pure here and invigorating."

"Yes, indeed. I'd like to come down here one winter and camp out with a lively, jolly party. We'd have some fun."

"You would, indeed."

Pomp and Barney soon had a roaring fire, and in a little while the savory order of broiling pheasant made our heroes hungry enough to eat the whole flock of them.

A heavy dew was on the grass which prevented them from going out to hunt game. But they stood near the air-ship and shot pheasants on the wing as they flew over the camp.

They soon had a couple of dozen of them on the ground, and Barney and Pomp divested them of their feathers as fast as they gathered them up.

"Broil them all, Pomp," said Frank. "We all like pheasant for lunch. Two day's supply wouldn't be too much."

"Yes, sah," replied the faithful darky, as he worked away at his task.

But the extensive cooking delayed them till near noon, during which time our heroes had their fill of shooting game.

Sallinger tried the creek and found that it had no fish—at least he didn't get any bites.

But the slaughter of pheasants was awful. The birds were numerous, and every minute or two they came flying over the camp. Armed with good repeating shot-guns, our heroes brought down one or more at almost every shot.

"Well, this is the best sport we have had yet," said Kensel, as he went down to the creek for a drink of the cold snow-water.

"Yes—I'd like to stay here longer," replied Frank, "but we have a long journey before us, you know."

At noon, with two dozen broiled pheasants on board for lunch, they bade farewell to the beautiful little valley and ascended to resume their journey southward.

"That volcano didn't wake up again during the night," remarked Kensel, looking back at the cloud of smoke that hung over the immense crater.

"No—it seems to be stirring up to a pitch that will cause a terrible eruption before many months," Frank said. "I'll never forget our experience there as long as I live."

"Neither will I, nor do I care to repeat it."

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp. "Dis chile doan want no mo' ob dat burnin' mountain."

"I think we had better keep inland—say about five miles from the coast," said Frank, after a pause. "We can have a better view by so doing, and a chance to pick up some fun."

"Then do so," advised Kensel, "but be careful

about picking up volcanoes. I've had all the fun with them that I want."

"All right. We keep about five miles from the coast. What a grand view of the old ocean we have from here!"

"The ocean is always grand," remarked Sallinger. "I never get tired of it."

"I am very fond of the water," Frank added, "and yet I live far away from any considerable stream or lake."

"That enables you to appreciate it all the more when you see the ocean."

"Yes—no doubt of that."

"Hello! Listen!" cried Kensel. "I hear firing somewhere!"

"So do I. It must be right ahead of us. There it goes again—a whole volley!"

"Hanged if I don't believe there's a small battle going on down there somewhere!"

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"There goes artillery! It's a battle as sure as fate! Ah! There's the smoke out there—behind that spur!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OUR HEROES WITNESS A BATTLE.

THE suspicion that a battle was going on around the base of the mountain spur in front of them aroused the excitement of those on the air-ship to the highest pitch.

"I didn't know there was any trouble in Mexico," said Kensel.

"There's always trouble somewhere in this unhappy country," replied Frank. "Some petty little chief is always stirring up revolution. If the government would only have them shot as fast as caught it would soon cease."

"Dar dey is!" cried Pomp, as the air-ship passed round the mountain in full view of the scene below.

Behind a series of strong intrenchments a party numbering probably a thousand men was engaged in defending the position against the assaults of perhaps double that number.

"It's a regular battle!" cried Kensel.

"Yes, and quite a number of the assaulting party have fallen."

"I don't see but two men down inside the fort," said Sallinger.

"They are rebels—those in the fort," said Frank, after a pause of some minutes.

"How do you know that?"

"Because they have no uniforms. The others have the regular uniform of the Mexican army, as well as the flag."

"That's so. Yet it looks as if the army would be defeated."

"Yes, the rebels have a strong position. It is a poor judgment which prompted the attempt to take the place by storm. Just look! The ground in front of the fort is covered with the dead and dying! They are brave fellows, but they can't carry that position by assault. Ah! they are repulsed! They fall back—they run like sheep!"

A wild cheer bursts from the victors, which rolls up far over the mountains.

But they do not pursue.

They were not strong enough for that.

The besiegers recover from their panic as soon as they were out of range of the enemy's guns, and are rallied by their officers.

But they cannot be induced to renew the assault. The scores of dead and wounded men lying on the ground in front of the fort warn them of the terrible consequences of such a mad attempt.

It was at this moment that the air-ship was perceived by the soldiers of the Mexican army.

They at once became very much excited, and seemed on the point of running away. Their officers, however, restrained them, and in a little while had them under complete control.

"Shall we go down and see what the trouble is?" Frank asked, turning to Sallinger and Kensel.

"Yes," answered the latter. "We may be of some service to the Mexican government that would be appreciated."

"Better let 'em er lone, Marse Frank," advised Pomp, who had a very poor opinion of Mexicans in general.

"Well, we'll see what it is all about, anyhow," and the air-ship began to descend.

It landed in an open space about two hundred yards from where the Mexican general and his staff had taken up their position.

The moment the air-ship had settled down Frank waved his handkerchief to the officers of the staff, and a half dozen at once spurred their horses forward.

"What is the trouble here, Senor Capitan?" Frank asked of the Mexican captain, saluting him as he rode up.

"We are fighting to put down a wicked rebel-

lion, senor," replied the officer. "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

"We are Americans, Senor Capitan, on our way down the Pacific coast, in an air-ship which sails through the air as you have just seen."

The officers rode up closer, and dismounted to shake hands with our heroes and inspect the air-ship more closely.

"It is a wonderful invention, senor," said the captain. "Will you kindly accompany us to where the general awaits you?"

"Does the general wish to see me?"

"Si, senor."

"Then I will go with you," and Frank sprang overboard and walked briskly over to where the Mexican general sat on his horse.

"They are Americans, general," reported the captain. "With an air-ship in which they are traveling southward."

The general was not in a good humor. It was not to be wondered at that he was not, considering the defeat he had just received at the hands of an insignificant rebel chieftain.

He looked at Frank in a manner that greatly annoyed the young inventor, and asked:

"What is your name, senor?"

"My name is known throughout the scientific world, general, as Frank Reade, Jr."

The general started.

He had long heard the name, too, even in Mexico, where the arts and sciences have never been held in very high esteem.

His manner changed at once, and he said to the famous young American:

"I have heard of you, Senor Reade, and am honored in thus receiving you in my department of the military divisions of Mexico. My name is Pares—a general in the Mexican Army," and he dismounted and extended his hand to Frank.

"I have heard of you also, general," replied Frank, shaking his hand, "and I am happy to meet so distinguished a soldier."

Frank had never heard of him before, but he knew the Mexican character well enough to know the value of a little harmless flattery.

The general was as vain as a peacock, and imagined that his military renown filled the world.

"Since we are known to each other," he said to Frank, "we can speak unreservedly. We have just had a skirmish with an arrant rebel, and are now preparing to crush him, notwithstanding the fact that he is strongly intrenched."

"Yes," replied Frank, "I had the honor to be a witness of the skirmish. The enemy is certainly very strongly intrenched, and it would cost a fearful price to dislodge him."

"I agree with you, but my brave men are equal to the task," said the general, with a very pompous air.

"How many lives were lost in the fight, general?" our hero asked.

"I don't know yet. We never stop to count our losses. We shall make another assault tomorrow."

"General, if you will accept the hospitality of my ship, you can have the opportunity to have a bird's eye view of the enemy's position."

"Ah! you are kind, senor. I accept your offer with the thanks of Mexico."

Frank led the way back to the air-ship, accompanied by the general and one of his staff. He introduced Sallinger and Kensel, and said:

"We shall go up and give the general a chance to see the enemies' position."

Pomp at once set the rotoscope in motion, and Frank guided the ship so as to give the general a good view of the enemies' position.

"It is a very strong position, you see," said Frank.

"Yes, very strong indeed," returned the general, dryly.

"Do you think it could be carried by assault, general?"

"Yes, but at a terrible cost."

"Terrible indeed," remarked Frank.

The general was silent for some time, and kept his eyes on the enemy.

Suddenly he spoke up, and said:

"A half dozen sharpshooters up here could soon force the evacuation of that position."

"Very true," assented Frank.

"Would you let me have the use of this ship one day for a price?" he asked.

"No—not for a million dollars," was the reply.

"But Mexico can have it free of charge if her quarrel is just."

"A thousand thanks, senor. Mexico is fighting for peace and quiet within her own borders. Those men in that fort are rebel followers of the rebel Martino."

"Why did he rebel?"

"Because he is a criminal whom the courts have condemned. By promising plunder to his followers he has raised a force that enabled him to defy the officers of the law."

"That is enough," said Frank. "I am at your service."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUR HEROES AID IN SUPPRESSING A REBELLION.

GENERAL PARES was overjoyed at the offer Frank had made as regarded the use of the air-ship against the insurgents. He was very profuse in his thanks, and said that Mexico would not forget him in her hour of triumph.

"I do it in the interest of humanity and good government," said Frank in reply. "The quelling of this incipient rebellion now and here will save both life and treasure."

"You are right, senior. That is the view that the government takes of it. If you will go down now and let me pick out my best sharpshooters we can soon begin this work."

"Are you a good shot, general?" our hero asked.

"Yes," was the prompt reply.

"Well, I have the most improved arms in the world on board—repeating rifles—and they are at your service."

"Let me see them."

A Winchester repeating-rifle was shown him, and its working was explained to him.

He raised it to his shoulder and aimed at one of the sentinels on the intrenchments of the rebel position, and pulled the trigger.

The man fell in his tracks.

"Ah, you hit him, general!" exclaimed the staff officer.

"Yes, he is a dead man!" said Frank.

The general fired again, and another man went down—and another—and still another.

The utmost excitement prevailed inside the rude fort, and a whole volley was fired up at the air-ship.

But it was beyond the reach of the bullets from below, yet every shot from the air-ship told with fearful effect on the rebels.

The staff officer took a rifle and aided his chief, and the rascals began to drop at the rate of two or three a minute.

When about a score of them had fallen a howl of terror came up from the fort. They tried to secrete themselves where the terrible repeating-rifles could not reach them, but in vain.

There was no cave or similar shelter where they could creep from sight, and so the relentless slaughter went on.

"Maybe they will listen to a demand for a surrender now," suggested Frank, anxious to stop further loss of life.

"Not yet," said General Pares. "I know the desperate character of Martino. He will die rather than surrender, for he would be shot within twenty-four hours after we got him in our power."

"Do you see him among his men anywhere down there?"

"No; I wish I could single him out. His men would surrender or disperse immediately on his fall."

The general and his aide continued to fire till a wild panic broke out among the garrison and a white flag was hoisted.

"There! there!" cried Frank. "Not another shot. They will surrender."

The general's face was a picture to look at. He was so overjoyed that he had to sit down and hold himself.

"Bring out a bottle of champagne, Barney," cried Frank, "and the glasses, too."

Barney hastened to obey, and as the air-ship descended back to the lines of the Mexican army, they were drinking toasts and making merry over the victory.

The whole army cheered wildly as the general sprang from the air-ship and mounted his charger to put himself at the head of his troops.

He gave the order to advance, and the soldiers seeing the white flag flying, promptly moved forward.

The rebels surrendered, but Martino escaped to the mountains in the rear of his position.

Pares was so angry at the escape of the rebel chief that he came near ordering the entire batch of several hundred prisoners to be shot.

But Frank reminded him that his name would go down in history as a butcher if he allowed a single prisoner to be hurt, and that brought him to his senses, and he ordered that they be treated as ordinary prisoners of war.

Then our hero invited the general and his staff on board the air-ship to have a parting glass of wine, and the whole party crowded around the little craft and drank to the honor of the United States.

"Mexico owes you a debt of gratitude, senior," said General Pares, "which she will not be slow to pay."

"She can pay me no debt other than to encourage a good feeling toward all my country-

men," said Frank, as he held his glass above his head.

"I drink the health of Senior Reade, the friend of Mexico," said the general, and it was drank with a hurrah.

"I shall give you the credit of this victory, senior, in my report to the government," said the general, as he shook hands with our hero, on leaving the air-ship.

Soon after that the air-ship ascended, and as it ascended the Mexican artillery fired a salute.

Frank waved the stars and stripes, and was soon miles away.

"They hate the stars and stripes worse than any flag on earth," said Frank; "and all because it once waved over the capitol of their country."

"He'll give you credit in his report, though, will he not?" Kensel asked.

"Not much he won't. He'll take all the credit himself, and merely make a complimentary mention of the air-ship of the Americans. You see, I know these Mexicans from A to izzard. They are 'n. g.'"

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, with a very decided emphasis.

"Sure, an' yaller naygurs they are!" said Barney.

"They am Irishers turned inside out!" retorted Pomp.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, springing up to resent the insult to his race. "Down wid ther naygurs!"

Kensel seized the infuriated Irishman and held him to prevent a collision.

Pomp was upon his feet with his woolly head poised as a battering ram.

"Hold on there!" cried Frank. "Behave yourself, Barney, or I'll tell Pomp to butt some sense into you."

"He-he-he!" chuckled Pomp. "Nuffin can't butt no sense in dat Irisher!"

"Shut up, Pomp!" ordered Frank, very sternly.

"Barney, go to the propeller, and don't leave it again!"

"Yis, sor," replied the irate Irishman, shaking his head, "but av I don't break his head, me name isn't O'Shea."

Pomp resumed his work, and Kensel turned to Frank and remarked:

"Your two men are ready to fight at a word any time in the day or night."

"Yes, and yet they are the best of friends. They have saved each other's lives several times. Barney is quick-tempered and Pomp is quite aggravating at times."

"Which is the best man of the two?"

"They are evenly matched always till Pomp resorts to butting. Then he always knocks Barney or anybody else out."

"Got a hard head, has he?"

"The hardest I ever heard of."

Neither Barney nor Pomp heard what was said, but they continued to glare at each other as if nothing would suit them so well as to have a round at fisticuffs as soon as they landed again.

By this time the air-ship was out of sight of General Pares' army, and was making fast time toward Yucatan and Central America.

"We ought to be able to reach a point to-morrow," said Frank, "from which we can see both oceans at once."

"That would be a sight worth seeing," remarked Sallinger.

"It would indeed," added Kensel. "But we want to look out for yellow fever. This is its native home down here in Central America."

"There's something worse than yellow fever here," said Frank, "and that's the chagres fever."

"Chagres fever!"

"Yes, a species of deadly malarial fever which attacks unacclimated persons when they spend a night anywhere in the lowlands."

"Then we had better sleep up on the highlands, or on the wing."

"I would not think of stopping anywhere in the lowlands," said Frank.

During the day they struck some old ruins in Yucatan, high up on the mountains, which did not appear to have been disturbed for centuries past.

"Hello!" cried Kensel, as he caught sight of them with the field-glasses. "There's something I've been wanting to see all my life."

"What is it?" Frank asked.

"Some old ruins. Let's go down and have a look at them."

Frank looked at his watch a moment, and said: "We haven't but three hours left of the day, and may as well stop here for the night," and the air-ship at once began to descend.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SNAKE AND THE PARROT.

No sooner had the air-ship touched the earth

than Kensel sprang out and started to explore the ruins of what appeared to have once been a great temple.

"Hold on there, Kensel," said Frank. "You don't want to tackle those ruins alone."

"Why not?"

"Because you may get into trouble."

Kensel stepped back nearer to the air-ship and looked inquiringly at the ruins.

"It's just the place for wild beasts, robbers and serpents," added Frank. "I've seen such things before, you know."

"Yes, I never thought about the danger."

"I know that. One cannot be too cautious about visiting old ruins for the first time."

Barney and Pomp went to work gathering wood to make a fire, whilst Frank and his two companions drew their revolvers and proceeded to inspect the ruins.

"Let's walk around them first," said our hero, "and see if we can form an idea of what they once were."

They passed round the ruins, and found them to be quite extensive, covering nearly an acre in extent.

"I think it was once a great temple," said Frank. "The walls were of stone, and here are huge pillars that once supported the front."

"And notice the solid blocks of stone piled one upon another," remarked Kensel. "It required great lifting power to handle them."

"Yes, and notice this plain here. It is at least four thousand feet above sea level, and yet as level as a floor. It must have been graded when the temple was built."

"Just what I think about it," said Sallinger. "I don't see any other ruins about, though."

"That's why I think it was a temple. They built their ancient temples outside of their cities."

"Here's an opening where we can go in," called Kensel, stopping in front of an archway on the south side of the old stone wall.

Frank looked inside and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" Kensel asked.

"I don't like to go in there," replied Frank.

"Why not?"

"Because it looks to me as if it was a snake den," he replied.

"Do you see any sign of snakes?"

"No, but in this climate you don't need any sign. Snakes are everywhere."

Our heroes fell back from the entrance and were engaged in discussing the matter when a hiss startled them.

Looking around, they saw the head and about four feet of an enormous serpent protruding from the archway in the wall.

"There's one now!" cried Kensel, as he glared at the head of the monster waving to and fro.

The three men glared at it, but stood still as statues.

Still hissing loudly, the serpent gradually came out, revealing a length of nearly twenty feet, with a body as large as the thigh of a man.

"He is going to attack us," said Frank. "Keep cool. We have nothing but our revolvers. If we can hit him in the head we can settle him very easily."

"Why not break for the air-ship?" asked Sallinger.

"That would enable him to grab one of us," replied Frank. "Aim at his head and all fire at once."

The monster had crawled up to within ten paces of them and began to make his coil. His head was raised about four or five feet above the ground, and the hissing still continued.

"Ready, now," called Frank, aiming at the snake's head—"one, two, three!"

The three shots made but a single report, but the effect was terrible to behold.

The bullets went through the serpent's head, and in an instant the most horrible writhing they had ever seen took place.

The long, brownish-black sinuous folds coiled, twisted, contracted, expanded and rolled about on the grass with such startling rapidity that our heroes were glad to retreat twenty or thirty paces back from the spot.

"We made a narrow escape that time," said Frank. "If we had gone in there, or if we had missed when we fired, one of us would have fallen a victim to the monster."

"Yes," added Sallinger. "When I fired I felt as if my life depended on the accuracy of my aim."

"A man's life often depends on the result of a single shot."

"Yes, and this came very near being the case this time. Just look what terrible strength the monster has yet."

"Their strength is simply enormous," remarked Frank. "That fellow could have destroyed a full-grown ox, or a lion, or tiger. Once

let them get one fold-grip, and they can crush any bones that ever grew."

"Look at his fangs! They are as big as my finger!" exclaimed Sallinger.

"Yes," added Frank, "and as sharp as needles. I shall cut them out to take home with me as curiosities."

They waited a half hour for the serpent to die, and then went up to it and fired two more shots at its head to make sure that it was past doing any mischief.

"He is dead," remarked Frank. "The first shot did the business for him."

"I wonder if there are any more like him in those ruins?" said Kensei.

"No," replied Frank. "You may depend upon it that this fellow was master of the place."

"But he may have had a mate."

"True, but if he did the mate was not with him, or they would have come out together."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. If we leave him lying here all night we will find the mate here, if he had one."

"Then we'll leave it here," suggested Kensei, "and keep out of the ruins till to-morrow morning."

"That's a good idea," said Frank. "We can hunt around for game the rest of the day."

"We have plenty of broiled pheasants if we don't find any other game."

"Yes; there's no danger of our starving, at any rate."

They went back to the air-ship and told Barney and Pomp of their adventure with the big serpent. Then they took their shot-guns and strolled off toward the mountain spurs in quest of other game.

They soon found birds of brilliant plumage, several of which they shot merely to examine. A large parrot was brought down by Kensei—having broken its wing.

He picked it up, and was nipped by the powerful beak of the wounded bird.

"Jerusalem!" he gasped, rising on his toes, with an astonished look in his eyes; "the blamed thing nips like a turtle!"

"Yes—and a blamed sight worse," remarked Frank. "You had better drop him."

He did drop him, with an expression which he did not learn at Sunday-school, and looked at his hand, which was bleeding profusely.

Then, as if indignant at receiving such treatment, he kicked the wounded bird about twenty feet, saying:

"You may be a good companion for old maids when civilized, but you ain't worth a cuss to old bachelors in a wild state."

Frank roared, and Sallinger leaned against a tree and held his sides as he laughed.

"It's rather queer," remarked Kensei, "that one should escape such a monster serpent as the one we just now killed, only to be nipped by a chattering parrot."

"Oh, you must give credit where it belongs," remarked Frank. "Your own carelessness or ignorance, I don't know which, got you into that difficulty. You ought to have known that parrots can bite harder than an eagle."

"I did know it, but never thought of it," returned Kensei, tying his handkerchief over his wounded hand.

"Just so. You owe the parrot an apology," suggested Frank.

"So I do, and I'll put him out of his misery," and raising his gun, he shot the wounded parrot to pieces.

"That was the best thing you could do," Frank said.

"Yes, and the lesson may be worth something to me in the future."

They hunted around and shot quite a number of birds of different kinds, some of which seemed to be a species of quail.

When they returned to the camp they turned the game over to Pomp, who made a selection of the quail-like birds and proceeded to cook them.

He warmed over the broiled pheasants, made coffee and bread, which, together with canned sweetmeats, made an elegant repast.

The night was spent till bed-time smoking, story-telling and viewing the scenery by starlight. After ten o'clock they shut themselves up in the air-ship and went to sleep in their berths.

They were awakened the next morning by the clatter of ten thousand birds of every description. The harsh voice of the parrot was heard over every other.

"Sorry I didn't slaughter all the parrots yesterday while I was at it," said Kensei, as he listened to the racket.

"You would have offended all the old maids in christendom if you had," returned Frank, laughing.

"Dat's er fae," said Pomp, chuckling gleefully.

ly. "Dem ole maids doan' nebber fuss wid er parrot."

"They don't?"

"No, sah, dey don't."

"Why not, I'd like to know?" Kensei asked.

"Kase dey bofe say de same tings all de time, sah."

Our heroes roared with merriment over the theory advanced by the old dandy, and then agreed that he was not far off in his reasoning.

As soon as they had finished their morning meal Frank led the way to the old ruins, and found the dead serpent where they had left it the day before.

No other serpent was there, nor did they find the trail of one anywhere.

"He had no mate," said Frank, "so come on. We have nothing to fear," and he boldly entered the ruins, followed by the others.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE RUINS OF AN OLD TEMPLE.

THE place was gloomy, for a large portion of the old stone roof still remained. That part which had fallen in made a sort of triangle prop against a corner, under which our heroes could pass by stooping.

Everywhere that grass and weeds could get root-hold a rank growth had sprung up, and moss, one of the most prolific products of a tropical climate, clung and crept in every direction.

"This has not been visited for many years," said Frank, standing on a moss-covered stone and looking around him. "Everything seems to have remained undisturbed for a century or more of time."

"Yes, but do you notice how large these blocks of stone are, Reade?" Kensei asked.

"Yes, I was just remarking it in my mind when you spoke."

"They would have remained where they were placed to the end of time had violence not interfered with them. Now how do you suppose this massive temple was knocked to pieces this way?"

Frank looked around again, and then at his friend, who was waiting to hear his answer.

"It is the work of an earthquake, I guess," replied Frank. "I can imagine no other power equal to the job."

"I guess you are right. It must have been an earthquake. Strange no attempt was ever made to rebuild it."

"Yes—every stone seems to be lying just where they fell. The inhabitants may have had a superstition that prevented them from touching a stone thus thrown from its place."

"Very likely. The builders of this temple were better architects than can be found in this country at the present day."

"No doubt of that. You will not find such buildings in Yucatan nowadays."

"No, nor hardly anywhere else."

They rambled about among the vast ruins, looking up at great columns that towered some fifty or sixty feet above them, and wondered if it was possible that a roof once covered the immense area.

As they were walking about they frequently found some very heavy blocks of stone just barely balanced on the edge of others.

Sallinger stepped on one of these, and it tilted over with him. He fell against another, and the one he had disturbed dropped about three feet, but with such force as to break the supports underneath, and the whole space for twenty feet or more around broke through the roof of a cavern below.

With a wild shriek Sallinger went down and disappeared from sight, whilst a cry of horror went up from Kensei.

Frank was too horrified to make any outcry. He sprang forward to look down into the cavern in quest of Sallinger, whom he feared had been killed.

But such a cloud of dust came up from the hole that he was forced to stand back to get his breath.

"My God!" exclaimed Kensei. "I fear that Sallinger is killed."

"So do I," added Frank. "If one of those blocks rolled on him he is done for. Run back to the ship and tell Barney and Pomp to come with lamps and ropes."

Kensei hastened to obey, and Frank got down on his knees and peered into the hole, calling: "Sallinger! Sallinger!"

No answer came, and our hero became very much depressed, feeling convinced that he had been killed.

In a little while Barney and Pomp came with Kensei, bringing a rope and lamp.

"Here, tie that rope around me, quick," said Frank, springing up and throwing off his coat.

The rope was tied around his waist, and then

the lamp was lit. Taking the lamp in his hand, he said to Barney:

"You and Pomp hold hard now, and let me down."

He swung off into the hole, and went down nearly twenty feet, where he touched the pile of stones that had fallen through.

Stepping over the stones and holding the lamp so as to cast its rays as far as possible, he saw Sallinger lying on the ground, a few feet from the stones, bleeding from a cut on the side of his head.

"There he is," and he made his way to his side as quickly as he could.

Kneeling by his side he felt over his heart and found that he was not dead. He lifted his head, felt of the wound, which seemed to have been made by the sharp edge of a rock, and saw that the skull was not fractured.

In a few moments the wounded man groaned and moved.

Frank kept rubbing his hands and shaking him, calling him by name.

"Is he alive?" Kensei called from above.

"Yes, but badly hurt," replied Frank.

Pretty soon Sallinger answered when he heard his name called.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Down in a hole, where you fell," replied Frank.

"Eh! In a hole?"

"Yes, in a hole. Are you hurt?"

"Yes," and he raised a hand to his head.

"Have you got any brandy with you, Kensei?" Frank asked, looking up at the faces that were peering down into the dark hole.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Toss the flask down here."

"Can you catch it?"

"Yes—let it come."

Kensei tossed the flask and Frank caught it. He unscrewed the silver cap and placed the mouth to Sallinger's lips.

He took a couple of good swallows, and felt better immediately.

"You are better now?" said Frank.

"Yes, but I am all broke up. I fell through that hole up there, did I not?"

"Yes. Are you hurt anywhere besides that cut on the head?"

"I don't know. I feel as if every bone in my body had been broken," and he got upon his feet with Frank's assistance, and began feeling himself to see if he could find any broken bones.

"Now, you must get back to the ship and lie down," said Frank. "Here, I'll tie this rope to you, and Barney and Pomp can pull you up," and our hero proceeded to tie the rope around his friend's body.

"Now, pull away, Barney!" he called, and forthwith they began to draw him up.

"Be careful," cried Frank. "Don't let his head strike against those stones up there. I'll wait here till you take him to the air-ship."

CHAPTER XL.

THE WONDERS OF THE OLD RUINS.

WHEN Sallinger was drawn up out of the cavern under the old ruins he was a pitiable sight to look at.

His face was covered with blood from a wound on the head, and several bruises could be seen here and there. Dust covered him from head to foot, and his clothes were torn in several places.

Barney and Kensei took charge of him the moment he appeared above the hole, and bore him off to the air-ship, leaving Pomp alone with the rope.

"Youse want me down dar, Marse Frank?" Pomp asked, as soon as the others had gone.

"Yes, if you can come down," replied the young hero.

"I kin git down dar," said Pomp.

"Tie the rope to a stone," advised Frank.

"Yes, sah."

Pomp tied the rope round a stone that was wedged in so as to be immovable, and let the other end dangle down into the cavern.

"You can slide down the rope now," said our hero, looking up at him.

"Yes, sah. Look out, I'se er comin'," and he proceeded to slide down the rope to where the young inventor stood with lamp in hand.

"You're all right now."

"Yes, sah, I'se all right. Dat was er mighty bad fall fo' Marse Sallinger."

"It was, indeed. It was a narrow escape. One of these stones would have finished him by just rolling over on him."

"Yes, sah, dat's er fae," assented Pomp, looking uneasily around the dark cavern in which he found himself.

"Take the lamp, Pomp, and follow me," said

our hero, "and we'll see what kind of a place this is."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp took the lamp, but he could not help adding: "Better look out, Marse Frank."

"Oh, there's nothing alive in here, because the way to it has just been opened, you know."

"Dat's er fac," assented Pomp, following him about and holding the lamp above his head.

They moved about thirty feet, and found an immense column, or stone pillar, which seemed to be one of many supports to the stone floor above.

Suspecting that such was really the case, our hero moved about till he found the next one, and then ascertained that there was a regular row of them clear to the end of the excavation, which seemed to be even more extensive than the ruins above ground.

"These are the supports of the ancient building above," said Frank. "So we are simply in the basement, or cellar, of the temple."

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac."

"They were big enough and strong enough to support any weight. I never saw such massive pillars in my life."

"Nor me needer," said Pomp.

"There must have been a stairway leading down here somewhere," remarked Frank, looking around, "but it's the darkest place I ever was in."

"Dat's er fac," but dear ain't so mighty close, Marse Frank."

"Yes, I notice that. It shows that the place hasn't been sealed up very tight. Let's follow this row of columns till we reach the end."

They did so, and passed column after column, going over a smooth stone floor. At last they reached a solid stone wall.

"This is the end to this side," remarked Frank, as he examined the wall very closely. "We had better follow the wall now, and get at the size of the place."

He proceeded to make the circuit, Pomp keeping close behind him with the lamp above his head. They soon struck what appeared to be another room, as there was a door in the wall of stone.

Frank stopped before the door, and looked around, saying:

"We don't want to pass through too many doors, for fear we may not be able to find our way out again."

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac."

"I'll make a mark on this corner here," said Frank, "so we may know it again," and he stooped and picked up a stone which his foot had struck against, and proceeded to knock out a small piece of the stone door-facing.

He succeeded in knocking off quite a chip, and then asked Pomp:

"Would you know that again?"

"Yes, sah, suah."

"All right, then. Come ahead. We'll see what's in here, anyway," and our hero led the way into the other room.

It appeared to be a room about twenty by thirty feet, with all kinds of queer shaped vessels of stone scattered around. Many of them were ingeniously carved.

"These are the strangest-looking vessels I ever saw," said Frank, after gazing at them for some time.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, "but dar's one what ain't made ob no stone," and he pushed a queer shaped pitcher over with his foot.

"That's so," replied Frank, picking up the vessel. "It's very heavy, though, and I guess it would hold at least two gallons."

The vessel was almost black, and quite heavy for its size.

As he set it down he struck it rather forcibly against the stones, and the peculiar ring that followed caused him to snatch it up again and look at it.

Then he made a dive for his knife, with which he scraped the side of the pitcher, and held it, up to the light.

"By the Lord Harry, Pomp!" he exclaimed, "this pitcher is solid silver!"

"Am dat er fac?" gasped Pomp, almost letting the lamp fall from his grasp.

"Yes—or I'm not competent to judge the ring of the metal. Just listen to that!" and he dropped the heavy pitcher to the stone floor again.

The ring was unmistakable. It had the true sound, and Pomp exclaimed:

"Yes, sah, dat am genuine silber."

"Of course it is, and I think it belonged to the silver service of the old temple overhead."

"Yes, sah—an' dar's more ob dem heah, I reckon."

"I shouldn't wonder. Let's look around and see," and taking the heavy pitcher along with him, he started to look for other vessels of the same kind of metal.

Pretty soon they found another pitcher of the

same size and pattern, and Frank snatched it up and exclaimed:

"This is two. They weigh at least ten pounds each—twenty pounds of pure silver."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, his eyes dancing with excitement.

Then they moved cautiously among the stone vessels, all of which seemed to be so deeply covered with the dust of time that each had to be touched to make sure that they were not of metal.

Suddenly Pomp held the lamp above his head, and cried out:

"Oh, de Lor', look dar!"

Frank did look at what he saw.

On stone seats against the wall sat four human skeletons, or mummies, for the blackened skin still covered the bones.

Frank had seen the mummies of Egypt, and was thus able to calculate at a glance that those four mummies had been there in that position for centuries.

Pomp was superstitious about the dead, and trembled like a leaf as he gazed on the four mummies.

"Let's go outen heah, Massa Frank," he tremblingly said.

"Look at those vessels on the stone table between them, Pomp," said Frank. "They are the sacred vessels of the ancient temple, and they are all silver. What have we to fear from men who have been dead a thousand years? Hold the light steady."

Pomp made no reply, but held the lamp above his head, so as to throw its rays over all that side of the room.

Frank stepped over the stone vessels and made his way to the stone table that stood between the four mummies, and tapped several of the curiously shaped bowls and pitchers that covered it.

Each one gave out a ring that startled both men—the true ring of silver.

"We've struck it, Pomp," said Frank. "These vessels are worth many thousands of dollars and they are ours."

"Yes, sah; we done foun' 'em."

"Yes, we discovered them, and that gives us the right to take them. Those men must have been guards or priests, who had charge of these sacred vessels. If so, they died at their post of duty."

Pomp gazed at the blackened, dried-up mummies and shuddered. There was but little sentiment in his mental make up, but he was willing to face a cave full of mummies for the sake of wealth.

Just then Frank heard his name called from the opening where they had come through into the cavern.

It was Kensel calling.

"Hold on!" cried Frank, in reply. "We are all right and will soon be there."

"All right," returned Kensel. "How is it down there?"

"Wonderful. How is Sallinger?"

"All broke up."

"But he won't die, will he?"

"No, not to-day, I guess."

Frank assured himself that there was a fortune in silver vessels in the place, led the way out into the main hall, followed by Pomp with the lamp.

Once more under the aperture, he looked up and saw the anxious face of Kensel peering down at him.

"Kensel," he said, "I have found the sacred vessels of this old temple, and they are all of solid silver!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Kensel. "What are you giving me, Reade?"

"I'm giving you your pro rata share of the find," replied Frank.

"Dat's er fac," added Pomp, looking up with a broad grin on his black face.

"Let me come down and have a look at them!" cried Kensel, greatly excited.

"Here's a ten pound pitcher which you can pull up and examine for yourself. I will tie it to the rope."

Kensel drew up the pitcher and examined it with unfeigned interest.

"Drop the rope now," called Frank. "I want to come up and get more lamps so as to get all, everything in the place."

When the rope was let down Frank and Pomp climbed and rejoined Kensel.

CHAPTER XLI.

A BONANZA UNDER THE RUINS.

"THERE'S a fortune for us down in there, Kensel," said Frank, as soon as he had rejoined the engineer.

"I am glad to hear that, but can we convert it to our use—get away with it?"

"Yes—why not?"

"We can't carry any extra freight in the air-ship, you know."

"Very true, but we can make a camp here, where three of you can stay, while the air-ship can carry five hundred or six hundred pounds of freight to the nearest port and ship it to New York."

"Ah! It's a great head for business you have, Reade," said Kensel, grasping his hand.

Frank laughed and led the way out of the ruins to the air-ship, where he found Sallinger lying on his back in his berth bewailing his hard luck in getting hurt just at the time he did.

"Why, my dear fellow," said Frank, "your fall was the luckiest thing that could have happened to us."

"I don't see where the good luck comes in," he replied. "Here I am all broken up for a week to come. I don't like such luck, however much you may."

"But if you hadn't fallen through that place we never would have found it, you know."

"Well, what difference does that make?"

"A great deal of difference. When I got you up all right Pomp came down and we both hunted around to see what kind of a place it was. We found that it was an immense underground chamber belonging to the ancient temple, where all the sacred vessels were kept. The place is full of the most curiously carved vessels of stone and silver you ever—"

"Silver!" gasped Sallinger, raising himself on one elbow and staring Frank in the face.

"Yes, vessels of solid silver—here's one now, which must weigh at least ten or twelve pounds," and Pomp held up the pitcher for the wounded man to look at.

Sallinger instantly forgot his injuries.

He sat up and examined the heavy pitcher which time had blackened.

"Pomp will scour it up bright," said Frank, taking it out of his hands and handing it to the faithful black, "and then we can see the workmanship much plainer."

"My fall was indeed a lucky one," said Sallinger, "provided there are many more there like that."

"Yes, and there must be at least a hundred or more there," replied Frank.

"Then I don't regret my fall. I won't complain any more. It was a lucky thing."

"Yes, indeed."

"How can we get away with it?"

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that."

Sallinger laid back on the bed, regretting that he could not take a hand in exploring the ruins with his companions.

Barney and Pomp were having a picnic in cleaning the tarnished silver vessel. As they progressed the many peculiarities of the workmanship came plainly into view, and exclamations of surprise or delight escaped them every few minutes.

At last it was polished, and a magnificent thing it was.

Our heroes examined it, and decided that there was nothing like it probably in any jewelry establishment in either Europe or America.

"We want to show these things as they are," said Frank, "as specimens of the handiwork of the silversmiths of a past age and among an unknown people."

"Yes," added Kensel, "and I am quite sure they would create a great sensation in both New York and London."

"Of course they would. We'll select certain specimens for our own use, and then sell the others at bullion rates if we can't get any more."

"Oh, we can get double bullion rates," said Sallinger. "People who prize such things would give double their real value to keep them as curiosities."

Frank and Kensel now went to work to get two lamps ready for use under the ruins, and when they had done so Sallinger insisted that he could take charge of the air-ship, and let Kensel go with Frank and the others.

"All you have to do," said Frank, "is to lie down and sleep, or read or smoke, or do anything else you please till we come back."

"Oh, don't worry about me!" he replied, "I'll be here when you come back."

"Well, if you need us for any purpose, fire your revolver three times in rapid succession, and we'll hurry back as fast as we can."

"All right; go ahead. I'll take a nap as soon as you get away."

Barney and Pomp took each a lamp, a box of matches and a large strong bag, and followed Frank and Kensel toward the ruins.

The young inventor carried a rope-ladder on his arm, and as soon as he reached the spot where the accident had taken place he fastened it to a stone in a manner that assured the safety of the party in using it.

"Now, come down!" called Frank, as he nim-

bly descended to the bottom of the immense underground chamber. Pomp followed with his lighted lamp, and Barney came after him. Kensei then joined them, and the work of exploration began where Frank had left off.

In the "treasure chamber," as Frank designated the room where he had found the silver vessels, they counted nearly one hundred silver pitchers, bowls, and various other queer-shaped things, which had evidently been used in the worship of the gods of the ancient Yucats.

A number of silver knives, clubs and great dishes were found. Frank looked at them closely, and said, after a long silence:

"They offered human sacrifices here, as did the Aztecs of Mexico, and these were instruments used in the horrid rites."

"Am dat er fac?" Pomp asked.

"I am quite sure of it, Pomp."

Pomp looked over at the four mummies leaning back against the wall as if he had half a mind to give them a kick for what they had probably done when alive.

"I'm very glad I did not live here in those days," remarked Kensei.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

"Let's look about further, and see what else we can find," suggested Frank, turning away and moving toward the corner on the right. Over there they found more stone vessels, but none of any metal.

"All the silver ones were placed on that stone table over there," said Frank, looking back at the silver pitchers and other vessels near the mummies.

Kensei stooped down and felt of one of the stone vessels.

"Why, look here, Reade!" he exclaimed. "This one is lined with some kind of metal!"

Frank quickly stooped and felt of the inner side of one of the stone vessels. Sure enough it was lined with a metal of some kind.

He scraped it with his knife.

"It's silver!" he exclaimed.

"All of 'em are lined the same way!"

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

"Begorra!" cried Barney, "it's rich the hay-thins wur. Sure an' it's rich we'll be, too."

"I wonder how thick the lining is?" said Frank, again stooping and examining the lining of one of the vessels.

He scraped vigorously with his knife till he ascertained what he wanted to know.

The lining was as thick and heavy as the silver vessels on the stone table.

"Think of that!" exclaimed Frank. "There must be at least two hundred of these!"

"Yes—it's a bonanza."

"It is indeed."

"And we were about to pass them by."

"Yes—I should not have thought of examining them. It was a lucky thing you came with us."

"This place is a perfect silver mine. We may find a great deal more yet if we look close."

"Come on, then, and let's see what else we can find."

They passed out of the smaller chamber into the main one, and resumed the search along the wall on that side. About fifty feet from the door they found a flight of stone stairs leading up against a stone roof.

"Ah! These stairs led up into an anteroom of the temple, for the use of the priests. The trap-door is closed—we can't get out by that route, and may as well let it alone."

"I guess you are right," returned Kensei. "We can go out where we came in."

"Yes. There's another door in the wall."

The woodwork of the door had rotted away entirely. Our heroes entered and the lights revealed what was evidently a toilet-room for the priests. There were baths out of solid stone, and many other things that went to confirm the idea.

Scattered about were a number of silver vessels, which gave additional force to the suspicion of the nature of the room.

"Gather up all those vessels, Pomp, and you help him, Barney," ordered Frank.

He and Kensei held the lights while Barney and Pomp filled one of the bags with the treasure. When filled, it was too much for one to carry, and so both laid hold and conveyed it to where the rope ladder led up to the light above.

"Dat am de fust time I ebber had more silver den I could tote," said Pomp.

"Bedad, but it's a heavy load I'd carry av it wur molne," remarked Barney.

"We shall all share, alike, Barney," Frank said. "Your share will be as much as mine."

"Sure, and it's just and roight, sorr," replied Barney. "May good luck follow ye all the days of your loife."

"It's good luck to have you along, Barney,"

returned Frank. "The fairies are kind to the Irish, you know."

"Be the powers, but it's roight yez are!" and Barney seemed to swell up with his idea of his personality.

After leaving the bag full of small silverware at the foot of the rope ladder, our heroes went in search of more treasure. They felt quite sure of being able to find more. Nor were they disappointed.

In another room they came across a number of idols of wood, stone and silver.

"Ah! This is a store-house for the historian!" exclaimed Kensei, as he held a lamp above his head and gazed around the room.

"Yes, indeed," returned Frank, "but we won't invite the historians here till we have 'scooped the boodle,' as the politicians say."

"Of course not. If all those idols are silver, we'll be millionaires when we get back to New York."

Frank laid his hand on one as large as himself, and found that it was carved out of stone.

"This one is stone," he said, "and I guess all the large ones are."

He was right. Only the small ones of the size of two-year-old children. But they were solid, weighing more than any one in the party.

"This is truly wonderful," remarked Kensei, looking around at the solemn-looking idols. "I am curious to know something about the history of these things."

"So am I," added Frank, "and after we have secured the silver we'll let in the wise men and have them investigate. There must be some inscriptions about on these stones somewhere."

"I have not seen any."

"Neither have I, but I know that such things are found among almost all ruins."

"Yes, and always among the ruins of old temples. But, look here, Reade!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Isn't it strange that all these things are down here in these dark chambers and none up-stairs?"

Frank looked at Kensei in silence for nearly a minute, and then said:

"If it is so it is strange. If the temple was destroyed by an earthquake, there would be idols and all sorts of vessels up there. But there may be any number of them buried in the ruins. The stones are too heavy for us to move, however."

"Yes, that's so. We'll look after these things down here first, and then see what we can find out up there."

They counted about two-score of curiously carved idols in the collection, of various sizes and shapes. All of them represented the human form in some way, though some had two heads, four arms and feet.

"The ancient Aztecs were sun worshipers," said Frank, "but I don't see anything that points that way here."

"No, nothing representing the sun," and they both held the lamps high above their heads as they glanced around the room.

"This would be an interesting study for the student of ancient history."

"Yes, indeed. To dig up all these things and ship them to New York or London or Paris, would create a greater sensation than the excavations in ancient Illium."

"It would, indeed."

From the idol room they proceeded to look along that end of the great underground chamber in quest of other curiosities. All along the route they found many stone vessels, the use of which they could only surmise. But few of them were of any intrinsic value, and so they did not waste much time on them.

Finally they came to the last corner, in which was a room of the same size as the others they had visited. All around the room on three sides ran a stone table, which was covered with vessels, which, on a closer inspection, proved to be lamps.

On the fourth side were a number of big vessels, nearly as large as whisky barrels.

"This is the lamp-room!" cried Frank, "and every lamp is made of silver."

"But these vessels are made of wood," said Kensei, "with hoops of silver," and he ran his hands over one of them.

"Dar's somefin' smells mighty good in heah," said Pomp, inhaling the air through his nose, and looking around the room.

"Yes, I noticed that myself," remarked Kensei.

"So did I," added Frank. "It must be the perfumed oil they used in these lamps."

"They must have had a perfumery that can live a long time," said Kensei.

"It would seem so," and Frank took up one of the primitive lamps and examined it. He held it under his nose and caught a faint odor of a delicious perfume.

"Yes, it was the oil they used," he said. "It

has all evaporated from the lamps, but the sweet aroma remains."

They examined several of the lamps, none of which were covered like the lamps of the present day.

"Les see what's in dem bar'ls?" suggested Pomp.

"Yes, let's look after them," and they turned to the other side of the room, where nearly a dozen barrels stood on a low stone table.

"Why, dem am covered!" exclaimed Pomp.

"Get up and uncover this one," said Frank, laying his hand on the one in the center of the row.

Pomp did as ordered, but found the cover fastened on; but by a little exertion he got it loose and raised it.

A powerful, yet fragrant, odor came up and almost overcame him. He leaped to the floor and gasped:

"Golly, but dat am strong an' sweet!"

CHAPTER XLII

WHAT OUR HEROES FOUND IN THE BARRELS.

WHEN our heroes retreated from the room they were apprehensive of being overcome by the powerful odor that came from the uncovered barrel. They were unable to stand the first dose.

But after they passed out into the main chamber they halted and breathed as freely as ever. The delicious perfume had followed them and filled all the vast space under the old ruins.

"It's the most fragrant perfume I ever smelled in any part of the world," said our young hero. "I never found anything like it," added Kensei. "What can it be?"

"I am quite sure it is the oil that they used in those lamps," replied Frank. "We could catch a faint odor of it in handling the lamps, where it had all evaporated. The barrel was covered airtight, and I'll bet there's oil in it yet."

"It must be hundreds of years old, then," remarked Kensei.

"Yes—the oil kept the barrels from rotting away."

"I think we can go back in there now," suggested Kensei.

"Yes—come on," and Frank led the way back into the lamp-room, followed by the other three.

They went up to the barrel and looked into it. It was two-thirds full of a fluid that was thicker than tar. Frank dipped the point of his knife into it and held it up. It seemed to be a cross between tar and soft India-rubber in consistency, and of the color of amber.

He held the knife to his nose, and said, turning to Kensei:

"I consider this one barrel of oil worth more than all the silverware we have found."

"The deuce you do!"

"Yes. This is perfumed incense, and being several hundred years old, has evaporated down to this consistency. It is highly concentrated, so that when diluted with alcohol, as they dilute the oil of bay leaves, one gallon will make a thousand barrels of the most delicious perfumery the world ever saw."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, completely carried away by Frank's words and the delicious odor of the oil. He was thinking of his wife's inordinate fondness for all kinds of perfumery, and how happy she would be when she got a bottle "of dat ar ile."

"Let's see if the other barrels are full also," Kensei suggested.

"No, don't open them," said Frank. "We can lift the one we have opened and then judge the amount in the others by lifting. To uncover them would expose them to the air, and we would lose \$100 a day by evaporation."

"Marse Frank," said Pomp, "doan open dem bar'ls. One am enuff ter open."

"You are right, Reade," said Kensei. "Let's lift 'em and see how much they hold."

Barney and Pomp applied their united strength to lift the one that had been uncovered, and were barely able to move it. Then they tried the others. All but one seemed to be filled. The lighter one appeared to be about half or one-third filled.

"This is the richest find ever known," said Frank. "They are worth \$10,000 per barrel, in my judgment."

Kensei tore a leaf from a note-book and wrapped up some of the stuff which he scraped from the point of Frank's knife, and said:

"I want to look at it by daylight."

"Yes, and Sallinger would like to get a whiff of it."

They left the lamp-chamber and made their way further on in the direction they had started at first. In a few minutes they came to a spot which Frank and Pomp recognized, showing they had made the circuit of the place.

"Let's go up now," said Frank. "We have been down here about four hours."

"So long as that!"

"Yes, look at your watch."

Kensel looked at his watch and was surprised at the time.

"It does not seem to me as though we had been here over one hour," he said.

"You have been deeply interested."

"Yes, indeed. Who would not have been?"

"True—come on."

They went to the rope-ladder, where the bag of silver vessels from the bath-room had been left hours before. Frank ordered Pomp to tie the rope that was first used to the bag, so it could be drawn up.

This being done, they all climbed up to the top of the rope-ladder, and were once more in the sunlight.

"Now draw up the bag," ordered Frank, and Barney and Pomp drew it up after a hard pull.

Returning to the air-ship they found everything as they had left it, and Sallinger fast asleep. Their talking soon woke him up, and he cried out:

"Hello! Back again?"

"Yes, we have just returned. How long have you been asleep?"

Sallinger looked at his watch.

"I have slept nearly three hours," he said.

"What is that I smell?"

"Here it is," and Kensel handed him the bit of paper with the lump of condensed oil on it.

"By the beard of Father Abraham!" he exclaimed. "It's the most delicious perfume I ever heard of. What is it, anyhow?"

"That's lamp-oil," said Kensel.

"Lamp-oil?"

"Yes—to burn in lamps."

"What are you giving me?"

"Lamp-oil several hundred years old," replied Kensel, "and we've got a dozen barrels of it."

Sallinger looked at Frank and then at Kensel, as if waiting for an explanation.

Kensel related to him the story of their discoveries in the great chamber under the ruins, and he was the most astonished man ever seen.

"What a bonanza!" he gasped.

"Yes," said Frank. "The silver is as nothing to it. I suppose they perfumed the oil to burn before their gods in the temple. The centuries that have passed thickened it and mellowed the perfume. It lays a way over any perfume I ever came across."

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp.

"And it's er fac' that we are hungry, too, Pomp," said Frank. "It's long past our dinner hour. Hurry up and let us have something to eat."

The last of the broiled pheasants were brought out, and a cold lunch was made of them. They were hungry enough to be satisfied with anything.

The meal over they lit their pipes, and sat down to smoke and discuss the situation.

"I guess we won't go any further South on this trip," remarked Frank.

"Well, no, I guess not," assented Kensel.

"Of course not," put in Sallinger.

"We want to make a camp here for at least a month," said Frank.

"Why so long?"

"To get our treasure safely on the way to New York," he replied. "I shall take Pomp and a load and go in search of a port from which we can ship them, whilst you two, with Barney, remain here to have a load for us as fast as we come for it."

"I understand," said Kensel. "That is the best way to work it. The port of Panama can't be over one hundred miles from here."

"I shall go in search of it, anyway, and carry as much as the air-ship can bear."

That agreed upon, Frank and Kensel shouldered their rifles, and went out in quest of something for supper. But very little game had been seen in the vicinity of the ruins. On going about a half mile off in the mountains they brought down a couple of deer.

"That will do till we want more," said Frank. "Four good hams will last us about three or four days."

Cutting the hams off, they set out to return home. Ere they had gone on a hundred yards they heard a couple of jaguars fighting over the remains of the carcasses.

"They'll pick the bones clean before morning," remarked Frank. "Let 'em alone. They will do as a favor by taking the carcasses away."

"Yes, but if they don't take that dead snake away, we'll have a pestilence here in less than a week."

"That's so. I had forgotten about that. I'll tie a rope to him to-morrow, fasten it to the air-ship, sail away two or three miles, and then drop him."

"That's a good idea."

They returned to the camp and turned the venison over to Pomp.

Then Frank concluded to remove the dead snake at once. The air-ship was sent up and came down near the dead monster. The rope was soon attached and the air-ship ascended, pulling the carcass after it.

After going about three miles, it was cut loose and permitted to drop in the midst of a great forest. The air-ship then returned to camp, where preparations were made to put in a load equal to the combined weight of Kensel, Barney and Sallinger, who were to remain behind to get out the treasure as fast as wanted.

Long before sunset the load of silverware in two bags was on board, and our hero only waited for another sun to start in quest of sport.

The sun had not been many minutes out of sight before the discordant voices of jaguars and other fierce beasts were heard in the woods back of the camp.

As it grew darker they became bolder, and approached nearer the camp. There seemed to be a dozen at first, and as the night advanced their numbers increased to an alarming extent.

"Why, hanged if I don't believe the scent of that oil has attracted them!" exclaimed your hero. "Just listen at them fighting around the mouth of the pit in the ruins out there."

"By George! That looks bad," said Kensel.

"We must kill 'em off—that's the only way to get rid of them."

"I can see their eyes shining all round the camp when they look toward the fire."

"Get the rifles, then, and let's give 'em something to howl about."

The rifles were brought out and the work of death began.

At the first fire five jaguars went down—for Sallinger was able to take a hand in the slaughter. The next moment all the others joined in to devour the fallen ones, and the welkin rang with their fierce howls and savage growls.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BATTLE WITH THE JAGUARS—SEEKING A PORT.

THE uproar made by the jaguars was appalling. The more that were slain the more came. "There can be no question about what drew them here," said Frank, after about a dozen had been shot down. "The scent of that oil has drawn them from a score of miles around. If the varmints didn't eat each other as fast as they fell, we could make a pile of money off their skins."

"Oh, it gives me pleasure enough to shoot 'em without being bothered about their skins," said Kensel, raising his rifle and bringing down another one.

Pomp and Barney took great delight in the sport, and, as they were good shots, many jaguars went down under their unerring aim.

Along about midnight those that had escaped death were full to repletion, but they were so powerfully attracted by the scent of the oil that they prowled around the camp, growling and otherwise disturbing our heroes.

"We have got to kill them off," said Frank, "and may as well keep up the fire on them. They have probably never seen a fire before and will prowl around here all night to look at it. That will give us a chance to see their eyes. Now let 'em have a few more doses of lead."

They resumed the work of destruction, and in another hour they could neither see an eye shining nor hear a growl.

"I guess we have about cleaned 'em out," said Sallinger.

"If we haven't we have thinned 'em out considerably, at any rate," returned Kensel.

"Hanged if I don't think we have cleaned the whole mountain of them," remarked Frank.

"Dat's er fac'. Dar ain't many ob dem lef', suah."

"Faith, an' it's dead they are," added Barney.

"Sure, an' the whole family came to say us."

"It looked that way," said Kensel, laughing.

They went to bed, closing every door and window of the air-ship to prevent surprises in the night. But they slept soundly, and when morning came they awoke and looked out and beheld the result of the battle the night before.

Dead jaguars lay around on every side, some torn pretty well to pieces, and a few other beasts equally as dangerous when alive and hungry.

"Hanged if we haven't got a big job on hand in getting those carcasses out of the way," said Frank.

"Yes, I was thinking of that," remarked Kensel. "There's no river hereabouts into which we could throw them."

"No, nor have we the tools for digging a grave big enough to hold them all."

"You'll have to bury them as you did the snake."

"Yes, I fear I will. How do you feel this morning, Sallinger?"

"Sore all over," was the reply. "I didn't know I was bruised in so many places."

"It's a wonder you have a whole bone in your body. Very few men have made narrower escapes than you did when you fell through that place. Just think of it! You went down with over a dozen blocks of stone weighing from one to two tons each. Had one of them rolled over on you when you struck bottom you would never have known what hurt you."

"It was a narrow escape, indeed, but as long as it opened a bonanza mine for us, I don't mind the bruises I received."

"Of course not, but one doesn't want to take such chances often."

"No—only once in a lifetime."

Pomp soon had breakfast ready, and our heroes sat down to broiled venison steak, with plenty of bread and coffee. They ate heartily, and then turned their attention to their pipes.

"Barney, you and Pomp will have to unload the ship. We won't leave here to-day."

Both Barney and Pomp were astonished.

"We've got to bury those varmints out there," said Frank.

"Dat's er fac'," assented Pomp; "dey is all got ter be buried."

The air-ship was unloaded, and the dead jaguars drawn up near by and tied to it by a rope—a half dozen at a time. Then Frank sent it up, dragging the dead carcasses after it.

When at a safe distance from the camp—just over a deep ravine—he cut the rope and let them drop.

This trip he made a half dozen times, by which time he had taken the last one away. It took up the greater part of the day, and for that reason it was decided that the trip to the coast on the east side should be postponed till the next day.

That night only one jaguar showed up, and a bullet made an end of him in short order.

Early the next morning Frank and Pomp, with a load of the curious silver ware, started in the direction of Palama, leaving Kensel in command of the camp.

All day long Frank sailed at the top of the air-ship's speed, and a little before sunset came in sight of Panama.

"Ah! There's plenty of shipping in port," said Frank, as he looked at the town. "The American shipping companies have agencies here. We must find one and deliver the bags at once, and start back at once for the camp."

"Sail all night?" Pomp asked.

"Yes—it's far safer to sail all night than to sleep in such a place as Panama."

"Dat's er fac'," and Pomp looked around at the surroundings of the town with an ominous shake of his head.

The town was reached and a descent made in the public square. The people were amazed beyond expression, and ran hither and thither in the greatest excitement.

But Frank soon made himself known to some Americans, who received him with the greatest enthusiasm.

"I want to find the office of the American Express Company," said Frank.

"I will show you where it is," said one of the citizens of the town.

Frank went with him to the office, where he had an interview with the express agent, in which he told the story of the discovery of many ancient curiosities in some old ruins.

"I want to have them shipped to New York," he said. "There will be several thousand pounds weight in all, and they are very valuable."

"How long will it take you to get all in?" the agent asked.

"I can deliver some 500 or 600 pounds daily, I think," he replied, "when the weather is favorable."

"Hurry up with it, then," said the agent.

Frank went back to the ship, and in a few moments he was on the wing again to make a landing at the door of the express office. There he delivered the bags, marked to the care of a certain firm in New York, with which he had done business in the past.

This done he purchased a dozen more large, strong bags, and set out to return to the camp.

As the air-ship ascended the whole town turned out to see them off. But in a little while the air-ship was miles away, going as straight as an arrow for the little camp-up in the mountains of Yucatan.

"Pomp," said Frank. "Keep her on this course till two o'clock, and then wake me up, when I'll take charge."

"Yes, sah," promptly replied the faithful fel-

low, and Frank left him in charge and sought his berth.

In a little while he was fast asleep, and the air-ship was making fifteen miles an hour.

Precisely at two o'clock Pomp called the young inventor up, Frank was soon dressed and ready to take charge.

"Is she running smoothly, Pomp?" he asked.

"Yes, sah, as smooth as grease."

"All right. Roll in and get all the sleep you can."

"Yes, sah" and he made a dive for his berth, whence his snoring came forth in deep tones and as regular as clock work.

When Pomp opened his eyes he found the air-ship resting near the camp-fire, and Barney was cooking breakfast. The air-ship had settled down about daylight, just as Barney was crawling out of his blanket.

"Oh, golly!" he exclaimed, "I didn't know we had come back."

"That can a naygur know whin he is er slape?" Barney asked.

"He knows he is not er Irisher," retorted Pomp.

"Bedad, he knows that same whin he's awake," was the quick rejoinder.

"I say, Kensel," said Frank, "I'll bring up a good sized tent when I come back again. You fellows would have a wet time of it here if a rainy day should come."

"Yes, I thought of that last night when I rolled in my blanket," replied Kensel. "We may have to stop here the greater part of a month, and may as well fix ourselves as comfortable as we can."

"Of course. I'll bring up anything you need if you will let me know just what it is."

After an early breakfast they put in two more large bags, and the air-ship was off again.

They made the trip nearly two hours quicker that day, because the breeze was behind them, giving them better speed.

The express-agent received and receipted for the bags, but Frank ordered boxes in which to pack them, as they would go much safer that way.

He started on the return trip earlier than on the day before, and he and Pomp divided the watch as on the first night. He had purchased a good size tent, however, and knew that the comfort of the others would be promoted when they reposed under it.

It was nearly sunrise when he once more settled down by the old ruins.

Barney gave a whoop when he saw the air-ship a half mile away, and hurried up the breakfast he was cooking.

"Here's your tent," said Frank, as he and Pomp rolled the large bundle of canvas out of the ship. "Put it up the first thing after breakfast."

CHAPTER XLIV.

SAVING THE TREASURE—THE CONDOR.

"I THINK we can carry them bags this time," said Frank, by leaving some of our weight behind us. Take out our supply of provisions, Pomp, and let them stay in the tent till we are ready to start home."

It was done, and three bags was hardly a full load. The air-ship rose up and sailed away like an eagle, carrying a heavier load than ever before.

The port was reached in due time and the freight delivered.

When a dozen loads were thus carried they came to the barrels of oil. The lamps had all gone before. Only one barrel could be carried at a time. The one that had been opened was reserved for the last, as they did not desire that anybody at Panama should tumble to their secret.

When the last package of oil was sent all the small silver idols were gathered up and packed for shipping, together with a few stone-carved ones.

After the last load had been carried away, Frank and Pomp spent a day at Panama looking after the shipment of everything that had been delivered. When they saw every article on ship board properly boxed and marked, they shook hands in congratulation over the completion of their work.

"It was a big job, Pomp," he said.

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac'."

"And it's a snug fortune for every one of us. We ought to take a trip in the air-ship once a year to see what we can find. There's always something hidden away for the man that can find it."

"Dat's er fac'."

"And you didn't want to come."

"No, sah, an' dat's de trufe," and the lucky old ducky grinned.

They left Panama in the early morning, and set out for the old ruins again. About an hour or so before sunset they heard the whoop of Bar-

ney, a half mile away, and soon after landed at the little camp.

"So you saw everything shipped, did you?" Kensel asked.

"Yes, everything was properly marked and shipped. We can set out for home whenever you wish."

"Well, we have been here long enough, I think. Suppose we put up stakes and move to-morrow?"

"I am willing. We can go over the mountain and skirt along the Gulf coast to Texas, and then make a straight shoot for New York."

"Yes, that would be a good route to take," said Sallinger, "as we could take in some famous volcanoes on the way."

"No more volcanoes for me, if you please," Kensel remarked. "I've had enough of them."

"Dat's er fac'," put in Pomp. "Dey ain't no use no way."

"Thru for you, Pomp," said Barney. "Sure, an' it's ter home we want ter be after goin'."

"Are you getting homesick, Barney?" Frank asked of the jolly Irishman.

"Yis, sorr. Me woiife is cryin' for me."

Frank and the others roared.

"I suppose you are not crying for her, are you?" the young inventor asked.

"Begorra, but I belave I have. Sure an' she's a jewel."

Frank knew that the honest fellow loved his wife, and so he took his hand, saying:

"I am with you heart and soul there, Barney. I want to see my wife and children too. I dream about them every night."

"Sure, an' it's the heart av a man ye have, Mister Frank," said Barney, tears in his eyes.

That night they spent in camp in a social way, smoking and telling stories, and at a late hour they went to bed to dream of home and friends.

Pomp was the first one up the next morning, and long before any of the others awoke he had a bright fire burning and the coffee boiling.

When the others were up, it was decided that they would leave the camp within an hour after breakfast. Barney and the others struck the tent, rolled it up snug and tight, and stored it away in the air-ship to be used again when needed.

Then everything else was packed away, including the supply of provisions which had been taken out some three weeks before.

When the breakfast was over Pomp put away the dishes, and reported that everything was snug on board.

"All aboard!" cried Frank, and in another moment the rotoscope began to revolve.

Barney gave a whoop of delight when the ship went up. He had not been up in the air for nearly a month, and the sensation was a pleasing one to him.

Up, up they went till they were a half mile or so above the ruins of the ancient temple. Then they moved in a north-easterly direction toward the Gulf coast.

"Off there toward the southeast," said Frank, "is the Caribbean Sea, which was once the greatest haunt of pirates in the world."

"Yes, and they were so numerous and bold," added Sallinger, "that they would land and attack large cities."

"But where are they now?" Kensel asked, looking off in the hazy distance.

"Gone dead," replied Frank.

"Bress der Lor' for dat!" fervently ejaculated Pomp.

"Yes, they are all dead, but the land sharks are as bad as the pirates ever were."

"That's true," assented Frank, "as I know from experience."

"What's er lan' shark, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp.

"It's a man who tries to skin another of all he has—a swindling schemer," replied Frank.

"Dat's er fac'. I knows dem ar kind er sharks."

"So do I," added Barney. "Bedad, but it's thicker'n fleas they are iverywhere on land."

"Yes, they are everywhere, and the worst part of it is that you seldom know one of them till he has bitten you."

By this time they had reached the highest peaks of the mountains, and were passing by them.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" exclaimed Pomp, "jes look at dat big bird!"

An enormous bird had just flown from his perch up on one of the peaks, when Pomp discovered him. He was twice as large as the largest eagle they had ever seen, and seemed to belong somewhat to that family.

"By George!" exclaimed Kensel, "that's the biggest bird I ever saw. What is it?"

"I take it to be a condor," said Frank, "but it's larger than any I ever saw before. They belong down in South America. That fellow has come up pretty far North."

"I say, Reade," cried Sallinger, "let's kill him and take his skin home as a trophy."

"Good!" and instantly the rifles were gotten out and held in readiness.

The air-ship was turned toward the great bird, which had been flying in a circle about the mountain peak, as if waiting for the intruder to pass on.

Before the game was aware of his danger they were in rifle-shot of him.

"All at once!" cried Frank, and all five aimed at the bird.

Cr-r-rack!

The five rifles went off almost as one report, and the great bird went tumbling to earth.

"That got him!" cried Sallinger.

He fell in an almost inaccessible place. The air-ship could not make a landing anywhere near him.

"I don't think we can get at him," said Frank, as he looked down at the monster bird.

"Bedad, it's full of foight he is," said Barney, who had been keeping an eye on the game.

"He's on his fait, an' dares us ter coom on. Sure an' it's game he is."

"Ah! his wing is broken. If that is all the injury he has received we can take him home with us alive."

"Then we'll try to get at him," said Frank, who was always willing to accommodate any one when in his power to do so.

At last the air-ship settled down so slowly and easy that Barney and Pomp were able to leap out on to a rock, from which point they could make their way down to where the wounded bird was.

As they wended their way down to him the Condor began to hop about and show fight. He was enormous in size, and as fierce as any bald eagle.

"Look out dar, Barney!" cautioned Pomp as the Irishman advanced on the bird, which had now backed up between two boulders, as if to compel them to face him.

"Sure, an' it's only a birrud," said Barney, going forward as if with the intention of seizing the game as he would have seized a chicken.

But the Condor snapped at him so vigorously that he sprang back to avoid being bitten, and would have fallen over a precipice a thousand feet below had not Pomp caught him.

"You want to be careful down there!" cried Frank, who was watching what was going on.

"Dar ain't no way ter catch 'im," said Pomp.

"Shoot him then, and bring him up dead. We can't be fooling with him all day."

"Try to get him alive," cried Sallinger.

They did try, and the result was that both of them were bitten.

"De lor' gorrarnighty!" cried Pomp, leaping back and rubbing his arm. "I'd as soon a dog bit me as dat bird."

"Shoot him," called Frank again.

Barney drew his revolver, and going to within a few feet of the condor, aimed at his head and fired.

The bullet nearly took his head off, and the great bird flopped about so vigorously that both Barney and Pomp had to get out of the way to avoid being knocked over the precipice by him.

Suddenly the condor made a spring and went over the precipice, falling a thousand feet below.

"Dar he goes!" cried Pomp.

"Let him go," called out Frank. "Come back up here and get aboard."

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

BARNEY and Pomp climbed up to the rock and sprang back into the air-ship as it slowly settled down alongside of it, their trip having been a failure.

"I thought your experience at chicken-snatching in your young days would have served you a good turn that time, Pomp," said Sallinger.

"Dat wan't no chicken, sah," replied Pomp, as innocently as a lamb.

Frank and Kensel roared, and Pomp wondered what they were laughing at.

They turned the conversation into another channel, and Pomp perhaps never knew where that laugh came in.

Not wishing to be caught away up on the snow line when the sun went down, our heroes pushed forward toward the Gulf coast as fast as they could.

But it took them many hours to cross the backbone of the longest chain of mountains in the world.

"These are mountains and no mistake about it," said Kensel.

"Yes, and there isn't any break in the chain, either, though they are nearly ten thousand miles long."

Late in the afternoon they began to descend the mountain on the east side, and when night

came on found a suitable camping place near a small mountain stream.

They have provisions in abundance and so did not seek to find any game so far up in the mountains. But the next morning they shot some pheasants and had them broiled for breakfast.

A little after sunrise they mounted again, and by noon came in sight of the Gulf of Mexico.

"We know where we are now," said Kensel, "for, by following the coast we will come into Texas and thus get home."

"It would be a shorter cut to go across the Gulf to the Texas or Florida side," suggested Frank.

"I'd rather keep above the land," replied Kensel. "We don't know what might happen."

"As for my part," rejoined Frank, "I'd rather be over the water, in case of accident to the air-ship, unless the sea was very rough."

"Why so?"

"Because if we shall fall to the earth we would be eternally smashed; if we struck water we could float and have a chance to save ourselves. Do you catch on?"

"I think I do," replied Kensel. "Which route do you prefer in getting back to New York?"

"I think we'd better cross over to the Florida Keys and West Indies. We need not be out of sight of land, as there are no end of islands out there, and we can encamp among orange groves every night if we wish."

"Well, that isn't bad, but how about yellow fever? I am slightly prejudiced against making its acquaintance in any shape or form."

"So am I, but I think we can manage to dodge it. Besides, we don't know that there are any cases in any of the West Indies at present."

They started direct for the water, and in a little while were going almost due North over the blue waters of the gulf.

Away in the distance could be seen a number of small islands, which seemed to run in a north-easterly direction toward Cuba.

As the air-ship moved well out, the scenery back on land was a grand one. The dark green foliage of the forests gave the whole an appearance that was at once pleasing and refreshing to the eye.

By and by they began to pass over some of the little islands, where orange groves and lemon trees were as numerous as pines in Georgia.

"This is the place for a winter's residence," remarked Kensel, as he looked over one of the little islands. "How I would like to lie off from all care in a place like that for one winter, where all the ice one would see would be in his pitcher of ice water."

"That's all very well to talk about," said Frank, laughing, "but you wouldn't care to spend but one winter there, I guess."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because of the dull, lazy monotony of the thing," was the reply. "It's the same thing every day month after month, no change, no excitement and too much danger to life."

"Where does the danger come in?"

"Poisonous serpents and insects. They are everywhere. There are flies there whose bite is almost as bad as a rattlesnake's, and spiders big

enough to give a man a panic to meet one in the road."

"That's enough," said Kensel. "I won't come down here to spend a winter. I'd rather go to the North Pole."

Sallinger laughed, and said:

"I guess there are warm places where it is not quite so bad as that."

"Oh, yes, of course, and they are so crowded that it costs a small fortune to stop there one winter."

"Yes—yes—that's the trouble. I guess I'll stop in New York for the winter."

"Buy an air-ship and go to Mexico," suggested Sallinger.

"Yes—that's a good idea. But tell me where I can buy one, will you?"

"Oh, they'll be cheap enough after awhile," said Frank, "and as common as umbrellas."

"I hope they may, for they would be a blessing to mankind."

During the day they passed over many islands scattered about in the sea, some large, and many very small. Some had settlements, and harbors, and shipping. Others were barren, having no population but sea fowls, which seemed to be everywhere in that part of the world.

As the sun began to sink down in the wide waste of waters, our heroes cast about for a suitable place to camp for the night.

"We could sail all night and be 150 miles nearer home by sunrise," said Frank, "but we wouldn't have any fun."

"Where's the fun to be?" Kensel asked.

"In camp, on a barren island."

"Oh!" and he didn't know whether to laugh or not, as he was not sure that he saw the point.

"On one of those little sandy islands down there," said Frank, by way of explanation "on a moonlight night, we can have no end of fun catching green turtles and—"

"Dat's er fac!" cried Pomp, "an' er green turtle am mighty good eatin' too."

"That's enough," said Sallinger, "we'll stop and see the green turtle awhile."

Just about five or six miles off on their left lay a little island a couple of miles long by a half mile wide. The highest parts were covered with an immense pile of drift from other islands in the group.

"There's just the place for us," said Frank, "as there's plenty of wood there where we can cook turtle to our satisfaction."

The air-ship turned in that direction, and in a little while had settled down not far from the highest point on the island.

"You needn't be afraid of any wild beasts here," said Frank, "as there is no fresh water on the island."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Everywhere we have been yet, we've had to be on our guard against wild beasts or serpents, or something else equally as bad."

"You don't want to go out into the water, though," said Frank, as Pomp and Barney began building a fire, "because the sharks live pretty thick around here."

"There it is again. If the danger is not on shore it is in the water. How shall we manage

to get any fish for supper?"

"Just bait your hooks and throw them out as far as you can. You'll find no trouble about getting all the fish you want."

They took their tackle and went down to the beach, Kensel and Sallinger, and threw their hooks out where the water was but four or five feet deep.

In a little while they began to haul in the fish. Some of them were almost too much for them, and Sallinger lost his hook after having caught several very large fish.

There was no lack of fish for supper that night, and our heroes feasted to their hearts' content.

But the fun came at midnight, when the big sea-turtles came up to deposit their eggs in the sand.

They came up slowly and cautiously, looking about as if half suspicious of danger. Then they would start up to a point where the tide never reached, except during storms, and began digging holes in the sand, in which they deposited nearly a peck of eggs each.

Frank and the others ran between several big ones and the sea, to cut off their retreat. The turtles saw that they were entrapped, and started on a run.

But they were poor runners, and one after another was flopped over on his back. Once on his back the sea-turtle is helpless and a prisoner.

"Now let's get the eggs!" cried Sallinger, and they proceeded to hunt for the buried nests.

They found two of them, and got nearly a half bushel of eggs.

The next morning they had eggs and turtle-steaks for breakfast, and never did our heroes enjoy a breakfast more.

But they had no time now to spare for sport, and an hour or so after sunrise started over toward the Florida shore, which they reached late that afternoon. Not wishing to stop at the lower end, where mosquitoes held undisputed possession, they continued to sail all night, and at daylight came in sight of Palatka.

There they stopped long enough to take breakfast and telegraph to the railroad syndicate in New York of their arrival.

Four days later they reached New York city, where they were tendered a reception by the directors of the Mexican Railroad Company.

The survey had been a marked success, as it put them at least a year ahead of their rivals and gave them a choice of routes. The company did not regret the expense of the air-ship, and cheerfully paid the bill with many thanks.

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Having settled up accounts, our hero returned to his home in the West, there to rest in the bosom of his family, till duty should again call his inventive genius into requisition.

[THE END.]

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